



NUI MAYNOOTH
Oifacais na hÉireann Mhá Nuad

**LAND AND POPULAR POLITICS IN
COUNTY KERRY, 1872-86**

by

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THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF Ph.D.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

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JUNE 2007

Abstract

This thesis explores the issues of land and popular politics at a regional level concentrating on county Kerry between 1872 and 1886. This was a period which witnessed salient political, social and economic transformations within Ireland and particularly in Kerry. In 1872 landlordism appeared to have had a hegemonic control over large areas of agrarian and political matters. Local government, parliamentary politics and land ownership were firmly within the control of the gentry. By 1886 this had irrevocably altered. Successive land legislation had removed much of the landlord's control over rent and the principle of a peasant proprietorship was largely accepted if not established. During the period Irish nationalism underwent one of its most formative eras in which it developed into the dominant political force in southern Ireland.

In examining these processes in county Kerry, this work has analysed the objectives, social composition and activities of various political and agrarian movements. In particular the Kerry Tenants Defence Association of the 1870s, Land League (1879-82) and Irish National League (1882-86) are examined. The work highlights continuities and differences between the movements to provide an in-depth analysis of agrarian and popular political activity in the county.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.	i
List of tables.	ii
Abbreviations.	iv
Introduction.	1
Chapter I: Background to the land war in county Kerry.	13
Chapter II: Depression and the emergence of 'radical' agitation.	46
Chapter III: Land League agitation: 1881-82.	71
Chapter IV: The Irish National League, Fenianism and Parnellism.	106
Chapter V: The operation of the Irish National League.	155
Chapter VI: Agrarian violence and Nationalism.	200
Conclusion:	253
Appendix:	267
Bibliography:	278

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a number of people for their assistance in the completion of this thesis. I would in particular like to thank my supervisor Professor R.V. Comerford for his invaluable encouragement and assistance throughout the course of this study. I would also like to thank academic and post-graduate colleagues who I have met in the Department of History, N.U.I. Maynooth and who have provided me with friendship and intellectual stimulation. These include; Dr Fergus Campbell, Dr Terence Dooley, Dr Georgina Laragy, Feichin McDermott, Dr Dympna McLoughlin, and Stephen O'Connor. I would also like to thank Dr Frank Cullen for his assistance during the production of maps for this work.

My sincere thanks to the directors and staff of the following libraries and archives who have helped me during the course of my work; the National Library of Ireland, John Paul II and Russell libraries at Maynooth, the library of Trinity College, Dublin, the National Archives of Ireland, Dublin City Archive, the Valuation Office and University College Dublin Library. The staffs of the Kerry County Library Service deserve special mention. In particular Eamon Browne of the Local History and Archives Section in the Kerry County Library has been of great assistance to me throughout my research. Also, the late Cathy Murphy of Dingle Library was always a source of encouragement for me. I would like to thank a number of individuals whose knowledge of Kerry history has greatly added to my own understandings. These include Dr Paul Dillon, Bernie Goggin, Gerry Lyne and Gerry O'Leary.

I would also like to thank my girlfriend Leanne for her continued support, encouragement and especially her patience while I endeavoured to complete this work. Also, I would like to thank her parents, Paul and Renee, for their never ending hospitality and in particular their Sunday dinners.

Last but not least I would like to thank my family without whom I would never have undertaken this work. My two sisters, Sineád and Eileen, my aunt Eileen and uncle Seán have been a great source of encouragement and support for me. I especially want to thank my mother Joan, whose belief in me and my abilities has been of immeasurable importance. I would like to dedicate this work to her and to the memory of my father, Robert.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.a: Value and number of holdings in Tralee Parliamentary Borough in 1874.

Table 1.b: Valuation of holdings of sixty three signatories of a pro-home rule address during the Tralee Parliamentary Borough election, 1874.

Table.1.c: Occupations of suspected Fenians in county Kerry, 1861-69.

Table.1.d: Geographical breakdown of suspected Fenians in regions in county Kerry, 1861-69.

Table 1.e: Annual rental of Talbot-Crosbie's estate, 1855-77.

Table 3.a: The number of branch meetings of the Land League held in each poor law union, Sept.-Dec. 1880.

Table 4.a: Number of rents fixed by the Land Commission in county Kerry, Munster and Ireland, Aug. 1881-Dec. 1883.

Table 4.b: The number of cases fixed by the Land Commission by valuation, the total number of such holdings, and the proportion of such holdings with rents fixed compared to the overall total in county Kerry, Aug. 1881-Dec. 1883.

Table 4.c: Return of farms in each police district in county Kerry from which tenants have been evicted or which have been surrendered, 1 Jan. 1881-1 Oct. 1883.

Table 4.d: Poor law union and grand jury expenditure in county Kerry, 1877-84.

Table 5.a: Year and place of ordination of parish priests and priests involved in education who attended the 1885 National League Convention in Tralee.

Table 5.b: Year and place of ordination of curates who attended the 1885 National League Convention.

Table 5.c: Number of branch meetings of the Irish National League by poor law union, 1 Jan. 1885-31 Dec. 1885.

Table 5.d: Age of a sample of members from four branches of the National League, 1885.

Table 5.e: A breakdown of 360 resolutions passed at National League branch meetings reported in the *Kerry Sentinel*, 1 Jan. 1885-31 Dec. 1885.

Table: 6.a: Number of agrarian outrages reported to the R.I.C. in county Kerry, 1850-79.

Table 6.b: Occupation of individuals suspected by the R.I.C. of being directly or indirectly involved in committing outrages during 1880 in county Kerry.

Table 6.c: Number of outrages committed in R.I.C. districts in county Kerry, Aug. 1885-June 1886.

Table 6.d: Objectives of 339 outrages committed in county Kerry, Aug. 1885-June 1886.

ABBREVIATIONS

C.I.	County Inspector
CO	Colonial Office
CSO	Chief Secretary's Office
CSO ICR	Chief Secretary's Office Irish Crime Records
CSO RP	Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers
D.C.A.	Dublin City Archive
D.I.	District Inspector
E.D.	Electoral Division
G.A.A.	Gaelic Athletic Association
I.A.A.A.	Irish Amateur Athletic Association
I.P.P.	Irish Parliamentary Party
<i>I.H.S.</i>	Irish Historical Studies
ILLNLP	Irish Land League and National League Papers
<i>J.C.H.A.S.</i>	<i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i>
<i>J.K.A.H.S.</i>	<i>Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society</i>
J.P.	Justice of the Peace
K.D.R.K	Kerry Diocesan Records, Killarney
<i>K.I.</i>	<i>Kerry Independent</i>
<i>K.S.</i>	<i>Kerry Sentinel</i>
K.T.D.A.	Kerry Tenants Defence Association
L.G.B.	Local Government Board
M.P.	Member of Parliament
N.A.I.	National Archives of Ireland
I.N.L.	Irish National League
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
N.U.I.	National University of Ireland
P.L.U.	Poor Law Union
P.P.P. Act	Protection of Person and Property Act
P.R.O.	Public Record Office, Kew

R.M.	Resident Magistrate
R.I.C.	Royal Irish Constabulary
S.R.M.	Special Resident Magistrate
<i>T.C.</i>	<i>Tralee Chronicle</i>
<i>U.I.</i>	United Ireland

Introduction

This thesis concentrates on agrarian and political developments in county Kerry in the period, 1872-86. It examines the emergence of home rule politics, the economic climate of the 1870s, the land war period (1879-82), the establishment and development of the Irish National League and the relationship between Nationalist politics and agrarian violence. In examining these aspects of the period the work explores the various political, social and economic dynamics that underpinned politics and agrarian matters. In particular, the thesis highlights the existence of varying groups within society that formed the basis of popular political activity. Throughout the period tenant farmers, urban home rulers, Fenian inspired activists and radical agrarians all participated in various movements, which challenged the power of landlordism and the state. During critical stages these groups existed in a complex juxtaposition creating powerful social and political mobilisations. However, these sections of society often had conflicting aims and objectives leading to dissension and disunion. This examination of such political and agrarian activities provides an analysis of the development of Nationalist politics during one of its most critical and formative periods.

Historiography

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish politics have been the centre of much historical research. This has greatly enhanced modern comprehension on the period 'debunked' previous myths concerning political and social developments in Ireland. Despite the large number of insights achieved by this extensive body of scholarly work, certain aspects of the era remain under researched. Inevitably, much of this work concentrates on issues either from the perspective of 'high politics' or providing general countrywide and national monographs. Internationally, trends in the discipline of history have witnessed a move away from the focus on 'national' histories. Topics such as gender studies, race, and ethnic groups have all emerged as lucrative fields of research, which have 'challenged the traditional historiography, which had concentrated on

political and social elites'.¹ This international historiographical movement has also affected the modern writing of Ireland's history. Extensive research into the history of medicine, gender studies, welfare and landed estates has provided fresh and innovative approaches to Irish historiography.² Scholarly local history and regional studies are another vital element in this process of broadening the scope of Irish history.³ Importantly, national histories provide 'only partial answers to the problems presented and other perspectives are badly needed to correct and deepen our understanding of the evolution of Irish society. Local history is the groundwork fundamental to our understanding of the country as a whole'.⁴ Furthermore, it is essential that local studies are located in the wider context of national developments and highlight the interrelationship between local and national history.

The post-Famine and land war period has received a large amount of analysis from a generation of historians during the past thirty-to-forty years. This body of research has facilitated further understandings on the background, origins and socio-economic implications of the land war in a clinical and dispassionate manner, which in turn 'debunked' the quasi-mythical aura that distorted past comprehension of the period. Important aspects of this research concentrated on the economic relationship between landlords and tenants in the post-Famine period. Initiated by Barbara Solow's *The land question and the Irish economy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), and examined in its greatest

¹ G. G. Iggers, *Historiography in the twentieth century: from scientific objectivity to the postmodern challenge* (2nd edn. New England, 2005), p. 7.

² A large amount of research has been published in relation to women's and gender history, for example see, Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995); Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd, 'An agenda for women's history in Ireland, 1500-1900: part I: 1500-1900' in *I.H.S.* xxviii, no. 109 (May, 1992), pp 1-19. History of the poor and welfare is a nascent area of research; for latest publication in relation to the topic see, Virginia Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power in late nineteenth century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006); Crossman is currently undertaking a E.R.S.C. research project entitled 'Welfare regimes under the Irish poor law 1850-1921' see, www.brookes.ac.uk/historyofwelfare; Significant research is also underway on the history of medicine at the Centre for the History of the Body (N.U.I., Dublin) with a number of monographs forthcoming, see www.ucd.ie/history/body.htm. Furthermore, extensive research on the history of landed estates in Ireland is carried out by the Centre of the Study of Irish Historic Houses and Estates (N.U.I., Maynooth), see www.historicirishhouses.ie.

³ Central to the study of local history has been the annual publication *Maynooth Studies in Local History* which to date has over seventy titles. Another significant set of local history publications include the *Irish County History and Society* series which to date has published seventeen volumes of essays dedicated to a prescribed county. The latest in this series is William Nolan and Thomas McGrath (eds), *Kildare history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 2006).

⁴ Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran 'Land, politics and religion in Longford since 1600' in idem (eds) *Longford: essays in county history* (Dublin, 1991), p. 7.

detail to date by William Vaughan in *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), this body of work highlighted that the rise in post-Famine agricultural rents did not increase at the same rate as agricultural prices.⁵ This ensured that some tenant farmers received a significant slice of the rural prosperity of the period. Some of these findings have been challenged by new research, which has revised estimates concerning changes in the values of agricultural output, rent, and labour costs to illustrate that farmers' profits fell behind these rising costs.⁶ Importantly, while current debate concentrates on the degree to which tenants benefited in the post-Famine prosperity, notions of landlordism as a predatory, rack-renting class have largely been discarded.

Unsurprisingly, the understanding that tenant farmers were a stronger socio-economic force than previously supposed provided the basis for extensive questioning of the background and emergence of the land war. J.S. Donnelly has posited that 'the land war was a product not merely of agricultural crisis, but also of a revolution of rising expectations'.⁷ By the beginning of the depression in the agricultural economy in the late 1870s, tenants' 'relative elevation in the world was hard won and had to be defended at all costs'.⁸ Samuel Clark offered another perspective by concentrating on the class structure of post-Famine Ireland. He highlighted the significance of a 'challenging collectivity', which composed of tenant farmers, shopkeepers and publicans that were socially and economically interdependent. This group, along with support from the Catholic clergy and agricultural labourers, mobilised under the Land League and effectively opposed and challenged the power of landlordism.⁹ In contrast to these viewpoints, Paul Bew has offered a Marxist perspective, which highlighted the socio-economic divisions between agricultural labourers and small farmers and large holders and graziers. These divisions led to the ultimate fragmentation of the Land League

⁵ For other expositions of Vaughan's work see, idem, 'Farmer, grazier and gentlemen: Edward Delany of Woodtown, 1851-99' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, ix (1982), pp 53-72; idem, *Landlords and tenants in Ireland, 1848-1904* (Dublin, 1984). For further analysis of rent levels during this period see Terence Dooley, *The decline of the big house in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860-1960* (Dublin, 2001).

⁶ Michael Turner, *After the Famine: Irish agriculture, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1996); K.T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (2nd edn., London, 1999), pp 97-99.

⁷ J.S. Donnelly, *The land and people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975), p. 250.

⁸ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 80.

⁹ Samuel Clark, 'The social composition of the Land League' in *L.H.S.*, xvii, no. 68 (Sept, 1971) pp 447-69; idem, *Social origins of the Irish land war* (Princeton, 1979).

movement.¹⁰ David Fitzpatrick diluted the importance of class in understanding the land war and concentrated on the existence of intra-tenant disputes and the role of familial inheritance practices as a source of agrarian unrest.¹¹

This impressive panoply of opinions have provided a rich source of debate and greatly lengthened the basis of potential inquiry. However, as William Vaughan, and latterly Fergus Campbell noted, these new interpretations on the land question do not constitute a new orthodoxy but 'are tinged with scepticism and purged of faith... they open rather than conceal the subject'.¹² Importantly, as Donald Jordan has observed, these interpretations are based 'upon analyses of social and economic changes on provincial or national levels. This approach... can illuminate major economic trends but necessarily distorts economic and social organisation at the local level, where the battle between landlords and their tenants was waged'.¹³ A limited number of studies have concentrated on the period from a regional perspective, including the work of Jordan on county Mayo, J.W.H. Carter's study of the land war in Queen's county, J.S. Donnelly's *Land and the people of nineteenth century Cork* (London, 1975), and Frank Thompson's *The end of liberal Ulster: land agitation and land reform, 1868-88* (Belfast, 2001).¹⁴ This thesis provides an insight into the period from another regional perspective, that of county Kerry.

¹⁰ Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978).

¹¹ David Fitzpatrick, 'Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland' in P.J. Drudy (ed.), *Ireland: land, politics and people* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 37-75; idem, 'Review essay: unrest in rural Ireland' in *Irish Economic and Social Review*, xii, 1985, pp 98-105; Other important works on the landlord question in the post-Famine period include, Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996); Terence Dooley, *The decline of the big house in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860-1960* (Dublin, 2001).

¹² Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, p. x; Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution: Nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891-1921* (Oxford, 2005), p. 292.

¹³ Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: county Mayo from the plantation to the land war* (Cambridge, 1994).

¹⁴ Ibid; J.W.H. Carter, *The land war and its leaders in Queens county, 1879-82* (Portlaoise, 1994).

Important doctoral research has recently been undertaken by Walter Walsh on county Kilkenny at N.U.I. Maynooth. A number of important albeit smaller localised studies have appeared on the period in question. These include; Edward Kennedy *The land movement in Tullaroan, county Kilkenny, 1879-91* in *Maynooth Studies in Local History*: no 48 (Dublin, 2003); D.S. Lucey *The Irish National League in Dingle county Kerry, 1885-92* in *Maynooth Studies in Local History*: no 48 (Dublin, 2003). For another important article on the land war in Ulster see, R.W. Kirkpatrick, 'Origins and development of the land war in mid-Ulster, 1879-85' in F.S.L. Lyons and R.A.J. Hawkins (eds), *Ireland under the union: varieties of tension: essays in honour of T.W. Moody* (Oxford, 1980), pp 201-36.

While some attempt has been made to analyse the post-Famine and land war period at a regional level, the historiography has invariably concentrated largely on politics at a 'high level' for the remainder of the 1880s. This period is widely acknowledged as vital to the development of Nationalist identity, leading to the political mobilisation of large sections of the population in the Parnellite election success of 1885. Significantly, current understandings on the period do not offer insights into how the semi-revolutionary, divided and often violent anti-landlord agitation of the land war transformed into a constitutionalist mass movement, which had home rule as its central objective at a local level. Pivotal to this development was the emergence of the Irish National League as the largest countrywide political organisation witnessed in nineteenth century Irish Nationalism. Intellectual perceptions on this movement are largely currently limited to Conor Cruise O'Brien's assessment, which highlights its autocratic nature and primary role as an 'electioneering machine' for the Irish parliamentary party.¹⁵ Joseph Lee has also concentrated on the National League's function as an electioneering body, believing that the 1885 general election success made it 'among the most remarkable political movements established in a primarily rural society'.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the National League played a vital role in the 1885 election, but little is known of the realities of the movement at a local level. Some limited research has highlighted that the Nationalism promulgated by the National League was neither popular or in tune with mass beliefs during various stages of its existence.¹⁷ Salient issues such as the social composition of its membership, and their motivations for joining the movement have not been analysed to any major extent. In contrast to historical research on Ulster Unionism, little or no attempt has been made to explore the formation of Nationalist identities during this period.¹⁸ By incorporating the time period of 1882-86, this thesis provides an analysis of the under-researched political body, the Irish National League, and the development of Nationalist politics.

¹⁵ C.C. O'Brien, *Parnell and his party* (Oxford, 1957), p. 128.

¹⁶ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 106.

¹⁷ A.C. Murray, 'Nationality and local politics in late nineteenth century Ireland: the case of county Westmeath' in *I.H.S.*, xxv, no. 98 (Nov., 1986), p. 146; James Loughlin, 'Nationality and loyalty: Parnellism, monarchy and the construction of Irish identity, 1880-85' in D.G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Ireland in transition, 1867-1921* (London, 2004), pp 35-56.

¹⁸ Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster Party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884-1911* (Oxford, 1989); James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism and British national identity since 1885* (London, 1994).

Furthermore, understandings on the agrarian violence of the period and its relationship with the developing Nationalist movements of the Land League and National League remain ambiguous. Agrarian violence in the pre-Famine period has received a far greater amount of historical analysis, and has been the centre of various intellectual debates.¹⁹ The agrarian violence of the 1880s has not been comparatively analysed despite the fact that, as R.F. Foster has noted, the Land League's power partially relied on 'a substratum of intimidation and real violence, though it was hard to quantify or apprehend'.²⁰ Central questions remain concerning the extent to which the violence that occurred at a local level was orchestrated by wider political influences. This becomes particularly pertinent in relation to the ostensible constitutionalism of the National League. Although Margaret O'Callaghan has explored agrarian violence in Kerry to some extent, this is undertaken in an attempt: 'to consider the nature of the connection between high and low politics as manifested in administration and law, though the focus is on government'.²¹ There remains no in-depth analysis of agrarian violence during the 1880s at a local or regional level. Other studies of localised violence in agrarian and political campaigns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have demonstrated the importance of such an approach to understanding the development of Irish politics.²² This thesis concentrates on violence in county Kerry during the 1880s and explores its relationship with the Land League and National League movements.

A large amount of research on various aspects of the history of county Kerry has been published in the journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society.²³ Of particular significance to this work are three articles published by J.S. Donnelly,

¹⁹ See Michael Beames, *Peasants and power: the Whiteboy movements and their control in pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex, 1983); J.S. Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: millenarianism and sectarianism in the Rockite movement of 1821-24' in Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly (eds) *Irish peasants, violence and political unrest, 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983), pp 102-39; Tom Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-Famine Ireland' in *Past & Present*, no. 96 (1982), pp 133-55; K.T. Hoppen, *Elections and society, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1984), pp 341-378.

²⁰ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 408.

²¹ Margaret O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a Nationalist Ireland: criminality, land and the law under Forster and Balfour* (Cork, 1994), p. 2.

²² For an analysis of agrarian and political activity in east Galway from the United Irish League to the war of independence, see Campbell, *Land and revolution*. For an analysis of the I.R.A. campaign in Cork during the revolutionary period see, Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its enemies: violence and community in Cork, 1916-23* (Oxford, 1998).

²³ *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*. The first volume of this journal was published in 1968.

concentrating on the Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century. Based primarily on the Kenmare Estate papers, this work provides an excellent insight into landlord-tenant relations in the region.²⁴ Landlord-tenant relations are also systematically examined by G.J. Lyne on the Lansdowne estate.²⁵ Another highly important work is William Feingold's analysis of voting patterns during the 1881 poor law election for the Tralee Board of Guardians.²⁶ While these studies provide salient investigations into various aspects of agrarian and political developments within county Kerry during the latter half of the nineteenth century, they do not offer a full analysis of popular political activity at a local level.

Sources and methodology

This work is based on a wide range of primary sources. One of the most vital sources in any study of regional political activity in late nineteenth century Ireland are newspapers. Local newspapers provide the historian with a narrative of events unattainable from other sources. In Kerry, local newspapers were central to the development of popular politics. Editors of a number of newspapers in the county during the period concurrently played significant roles in local politics. This was particularly the case with the *Kerry Sentinel*, which was established in 1878 by a school teacher from Castletownbere, county Cork; Timothy Harrington. This newspaper became the leading exponent of Parnellism in the county. Timothy Harrington, who became the most prominent Land Leaguer in the county, quickly rose up the ranks of the movement, emerging as one of Parnell's leading lieutenants, and was appointed as secretary of the National League in 1882. From this point on, his brother, Edward Harrington, took over as editor of the newspaper and became the leading National Leaguer in the county. This newspaper, which was published three times a week, was the official mouthpiece of the Land and National League in the county. The close relationship Timothy, and later

²⁴ J.S. Donnelly, 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 21 (1988), pp 5-41; idem 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 22 (1989), pp 61-98; idem 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 23 (1990), pp 5-45.

²⁵ G.J Lyne, *The Lansdowne estate in Kerry under the agency of William Stuart Trench, 1849-72* (Dublin, 2001).

²⁶ W.L. Feingold 'Land League power: the Tralee poor-law election of 1881' in Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly (eds), *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1915* (Manchester, 1983), pp 285-310;

Edward Harrington, had with the national leadership ensured that editorially the newspaper constantly reflected the objectives and ideology of the wider movement. Every edition of the newspaper in the period 1878-86 was consulted to establish the development of Parnellism in the county. Furthermore, the newspaper provided widespread coverage of branch activity of the Land and National Leagues. Meetings of local branches were reported in the newspaper. Although these reports were subject to some form of censorship, they provided the opportunity to explore the movement at a local and grassroots level. In these reports information on the membership of branches, resolutions passed and topics discussed during meetings was obtained. From this systematic investigation of reports of branch meetings of the Land and National League, an understanding of the activities of these movements at a local level was achieved. For example, to determine the social, economic and political outlook of the National League during 1885, the resolutions passed at 358 local branch meetings were catalogued. This provided a database of 360 resolutions, which were utilised to statistically analyse the character of the movement. Information concerning the membership of the local branches of the National League, which appeared in the reports in the *Kerry Sentinel*, were weaved with other primary sources to illuminate the social composition of the movement. Francis Guy's, *Guy's Munster Directory* (Cork, 1886) was consulted to determine the occupations and addresses of a number of names that appeared in the reports. This provided the opportunity to achieve a profile of leading local leaguers. When applicable, the 1901 census returns (N.A.I., Dublin) gave information relating to age of the leaguers and the age of their children, which indicated whether they were married when they joined the league. Other information concerning the individual leaguers was also achieved through an examination of valuation records (Valuation Office, Dublin). The examination of the government valuation of the holdings of individuals who became members of the league highlighted their socio-economic background. The *Kerry Sentinel* also provided extensive information relative to landlord-tenant relations and the agrarian and political agitations of the period. Evictions, agrarian outrages, local government

idem *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872-86* (Boston, 1984).

activity, and the exertions of the police were all reported. Such information granted the ability to depict a day-to-day account of the agitation that marked this period.

While the *Kerry Sentinel* offered information through the prism of Parnellite politics, to achieve a balance other newspapers were extensively researched. In Kerry, landlord and unionist opinion was represented by the *Kerry Evening Post*, a newspaper which spanned three centuries (1774-1917).²⁷ Unsurprisingly, this newspaper frequently criticised the agrarian and political agitations, while also promoting the interests of landlordism. Interestingly, a number of other newspapers that appealed to the general 'Nationalist' reading public competed with the *Kerry Sentinel*. The *Tralee Chronicle* (1843-1881) consistently supported the home rule and tenant right movements of the 1870s and its editor, J.J. Long, acted as the first president of the Kerry Tenants Defence Association. By 1880, the newspaper failed to support the nascent Land League and by May 1881 had collapsed. However, other budding Nationalists and journalists were willing to challenge the *Sentinel's* hegemony over the local Nationalist press. In October 1880, a founding member of the Tralee Land League, Henry Brassill, established a newspaper entitled the *Kerry Independent* (1880-1884). While the *Independent* fully supported the emerging land agitation, by 1881 it clashed with the *Kerry Sentinel* over Land League policy concerning the 1881 Land Act. Representing the objectives of the Catholic clergy and larger tenant farmers, the *Independent* welcomed the act, while the *Sentinel* promoted the official Land League response of moderate hostility. In 1883 another Tralee based newspaper, the *Kerry Weekly Reporter and Advertiser*, was established. Although the newspaper was of a Nationalist persuasion and carried reports of branch meetings of the National League it pledged in its opening editorial to 'have nothing to do with politics or political party'.²⁸ In contrast to the *Sentinel*, the newspaper wasn't the official mouthpiece of the National League and often offered a more unbiased version of events. On numerous occasions the newspaper reported on local controversies concerning the National League which the *Sentinel* ignored, such as the suppression of the Dingle National League by the Central Branch.²⁹ The *Kerry Sentinel* never achieved

²⁷ James O'Toole, *Newsplan: report of the Newsplan project in Ireland* (London, 1992), pp 141-3, p. 241.

²⁸ *K.W.R.*, 3 Feb. 1883.

²⁹ See D.S. Lucey *The Irish National League in Dingle, county Kerry, 1885-92* in *Maynooth Studies in Local History*: no. 48 (Dublin, 2003).

dominance over Nationalist newspaper reporting in the county. Competing viewpoints originating from sections of the 'Nationalist' community often found articulation in these publications as did information which the leadership of the National League wished to contain. These newspapers proved vital in analysing the development of Nationalist politics in the county. Also, a number of national newspapers such as the *Freeman's Journal* and *United Ireland* were also consulted.

Another major source for this source is police material that passed through the Chief Secretary's Office. Located in the National Archives in Dublin, this information is divided into various different sections. The current make up of the sources is reflective of contemporary changes within the administration. The Irish Land League and National League papers consist of police material relating to these two organisations. These files, which were largely based on the county inspector's monthly reports, were compiled for reports on the state of the country for the Chief Secretary.³⁰ While these sources provide a useful amount of information, the most fruitful source remains the Registered Papers. The Registered Papers are a vast source comprising of documents on a whole range of issues relating to the government of Ireland under Dublin Castle.³¹ After a systematic search of this source, which included box to box searches for certain periods, I succeeded in locating a large number of sources relating to police activity and their monitoring of the agrarian and political agitations of the period in Kerry. Significantly, a full set of monthly county inspector reports, which were accompanied intermittently by district inspector reports from the county, was located for the period 1883 to 1886.³² While the county inspector reports are widely available on microfilm in the British in Ireland series for the period 1898-1921, this is not the case for the 1880s.³³ The information acquired from the examination of these police reports provided a fresh and innovative insight into the political and social history of 1880s Kerry. As Margaret O'Callaghan has noted: 'the

³⁰ R.B. McDowell, *The Irish administration, 1801-1914* (Dublin, 1964), p. 143.

³¹ For an overview what this vast source contains see Tom Quinlan, 'The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office' in *Irish Archives* (Autumn, 1994), pp 5-21.

³² I would like to acknowledge help from both Fergus Campbell and Terence Dooley in helping me locate these police reports.

³³ *The British in Ireland. Series I: part 1: anti-government organisations, 1882-1921* [Colonial Office Class CO 904 (Dublin Castle records)] (Brighton, 1982), 14 microfilms.

reports of the R.I.C. are remarkable documents. With the possible exception of France, no European country was so intimately documented'.³⁴

Other manuscript sources utilised in the course of this thesis include a number of private papers. The Timothy Harrington papers and Land League papers (both located in N.L.I. Dublin) provided information relating to the Land and National League. Although these sources are of a limited nature, especially considering the extent of both movements, the material did provide an insight into the internal workings of the organisations, which other sources such as local newspapers and police reports did not offer. The diocesan records of the Catholic Church in Kerry also provided significant information relating to the activities of the clergy in local politics (K.D.R., Killarney). The personal papers of Heffernan Considine, the resident magistrate for the Tralee area during the period, also greatly illuminated aspects of the land agitation of the 1880s. An unsorted collection, this source has been utilised to a very limited extent by other historians.³⁵ Other manuscript sources researched for this work include; Michael Davitt papers (Trinity College, Dublin), Mansion House Fund papers (D.C.A., Dublin), Valuation records (Valuation Office, Dublin), Talbot-Crosbie estate papers (N.L.I., Dublin), and Drummond estate papers (N.A.I., Dublin).

A wide-range of printed primary material was also consulted. A number of biographies by contemporaries on both a national and local level were examined. The publication of the proceedings of the Special Commission provided another valuable source of information.³⁶ A large number of R.I.C. officials, land agents, paid informants, victims of attacks, boycotted parties and relatives of people murdered from Kerry were subpoenaed before the commission.³⁷ Parliamentary papers of the House of Commons also provided much information. A number of commissions of inquiries investigated agrarian relations in Ireland during the period. Much commentary and evidence from witnesses from the county is located in these commissions. Furthermore, a range of

³⁴ O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a Nationalist Ireland*, p. 2.

³⁵ The only reference located by this author of this source was in Stephen Ball, 'Crowd activity during the Irish Land War, 1879-90' in Peter Jupp and Eoin Magennis (eds), *Crowds in Ireland, 1720-1920* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp 212-48.

³⁶ *Special commission act, reprint of the shorthand notes of the speeches, proceedings, and evidence taken before the commissioners appointed under the above act*, (14 vols, London, 1890).

statistical information relating to a range of issues such as agrarian outrages, evictions, and local government was also located in the parliamentary papers.

Outline of chapters

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Of these the first five deal with the period in a chronological order. The first chapter highlights the major developments in the decade leading up the land war. It describes the social and economic circumstances of society and landlord-tenant relations. It also highlights the development of home rule and agrarian politics. Chapter II explores the outbreak of economic distress and describes the initial reaction to it. Chapter III concentrates on the emergence of 'radical' agrarianism and the Land League and examines the course of the anti-landlord agitation. The attempt by Parnell to transform the agrarianism of the Land League into a constitutional movement, with home rule as its central objective through the Irish National League is examined in Chapter IV. Chapter V provides a systematic analysis of the development of the National League as a mass movement in 1885. This chapter concentrates on the objectives and social composition of the movement at a local level while also highlighting the effect it had on the development of Nationalism. The final chapter deals with the nature of agrarian violence throughout the period of the Land and National Leagues.

³⁷ O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a Nationalist Ireland*, p. 124.

Chapter I: Background to the land war in county Kerry.

1.1: Economy in post-Famine Kerry.

This chapter concentrates on the 1870s. This decade provided the economic, social and political background to the land war of the 1880s. The period was largely one of economic prosperity due to a prolonged era of high prices for agricultural produces. A Catholic middle class of middle to large tenant farmers and urban traders were the primary benefactors of this prosperity. This middle class grouping became increasingly politicised and were central to the development of the home rule movement and the moderate agrarian politics of the decade. However, the existence of high agricultural prices ensured that these potential issues of agitation failed to mobilise large sections of the population. Furthermore, throughout the decade tenants became increasingly incorporated into an agrarian capitalist economy. This led to the expansion of a consumer society and the development of extensive systems of lending and credit. Importantly, a vibrant trade in tenant-right also developed during this period. This chapter focuses on these transformations.

During the Famine and post-Famine period Kerry witnessed a consolidation of farm holdings. Emigration and clearances left large tracts of untenanted lands for the tenant community that had survived the Famine. Correspondingly, while the number of farms in the county decreased, their size increased. In 1848 22,710 agricultural holdings existed in Kerry of which 43.8% were over thirty acres. By 1860 the number of holdings had decreased to 18,117, leading to an increase in farm sizes with 53.6% of all farms over thirty acres.¹ This consolidation of agricultural holdings was linked largely to the near-disappearance of the cottiers and labourers who suffered the most from Famine depopulation.² This increase in farm size brought about a larger tenant farmer class who were to benefit from the post-Famine resurgence in the agricultural economy. However, the large differences in terrain and quality of land within the county, led to geographically varying regions of prosperity. The most prosperous tenant farmers were

¹ See appendix 1.

² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland: politics and war* (Oxford, 1999), p. 82.

largely centred in an interconnected low-lying region that comprised parts of the Tralee, Listowel and Killarney poor law unions. This region was roughly centred between Listowel town in the north, Castleisland in the east, Killarney in the south and Tralee in the west and contained land of medium to high value. The area, which provided the longest continuous stretch of low land in the southwest, was 'at best a rich, well drained pasture and meadow'.³ The high quality land in this region was signified in the fact that seventy seven per cent of the county's holdings valued above £10 were located in these unions.⁴ This area contrasted with the southern and western unions of Caherciveen, Dingle and Kenmare, which were regions of extremely poor, barren and mountainous land. These differences are demonstrated in the government valuation (Griffith's) of agricultural holdings in each union. The poor law unions of Caherciveen, Dingle and Kenmare had eight-four, seventy-six, and seventy-five percent of the holdings respectively below the valuation of £10. The northern and central unions of Tralee, Listowel and Killarney were better off with sixty-three, sixty and fifty-nine percent of holdings respectively valued at less than £10.⁵

Many farmers in the northern and central low lands achieved a relatively prosperous standard of living. At the highest level within tenant society were the large farmers who held valuable lands. This group of large farmers were predominately located in the three northern unions. In these areas 888 farms had a valuation above £50, compared to the southern and western unions, which had a mere seventy with such valuations.⁶ A tenant farmer, named Florence O'Sullivan, who resided in one of the highest valued Poor Law Union Electoral Divisions in the county, Ardfert, exemplified these large farmers.⁷ He held 150 acres, which had a government valuation of £160. On his farm he employed a number of male and female farm servants at a cost of between £12 and £16 a year. Furthermore, additional seasonal labour was hired during harvest

³ T.W. Freeman, *Ireland: a general and regional geography* (4th edn., London, 1969), p. 360.

⁴ *Return of agricultural holdings, compiled by the local government board in Ireland from the returns furnished by the clerks of the poor law unions in Ireland 1881*, p. 4 [C 2934], H.C. 1881, xcii, 793.

⁵ J.S. Donnelly, 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century' in *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological & Historical Society*, no. 21 (1988), p. 13.

⁶ *Return of agricultural holdings...*, 1881, p. 4.

⁷ *Return showing, with regard to each electoral division in Ireland, the gross rateable valuation per acre, the total population, the rateable valuation per head of the population, and the average poor rate for the last five years*, p. 33, H.C. 1887 (27), lxxi, 51.

time. The large income derived from the farm was depicted in the fact that he paid £400 in rent to his landlord, William Talbot-Crosbie, in 1876. Despite that his rent was almost two and half times the government valuation (Griffith's) he commented in 1881: 'I have no complaint to make against Mr Crosbie. I have every right to be thankful to him'.⁸ Evidently, the farm produced enough income to satisfy all demands of landlord, labourer and himself.

Although O'Sullivan's circumstances were exceptionally good, medium sized farmers also experienced a relatively high standard of living. Increasingly the farming community was concerned with education. In the Catholic parishes of Ardfert and Kilmoyley, the number of children attending national school grew from under 200 in the pre-Famine period to over 1,100 in 1880.⁹ This increased participation in education witnessed the illiteracy rates in the county drop from seventy-five percent in 1841 to thirty-five percent in 1881.¹⁰ Illiteracy rates were lowest in the areas with highly valued land. In some areas of good land, such as Kilnanare, the illiteracy rate was as low as seventeen percent.¹¹ The northern and central lowland corridor demonstrated low illiteracy rates. Furthermore, similar to much of the rest of the country, the northern region experienced a growth in church building. In the twenty-five years after the Famine, £7,000 had been laid out for the construction of two Catholic churches in Ardfert, half of which was paid by the local congregation.¹² The tenant population's dietary and dress habits had also developed since the Famine. According to Fr Denis O'Donoghue in 1880, the parish priest of Ardfert, tenants no longer depended on potatoes or home manufactured clothing. Instead, food and dress were largely consumed by the tenantry.¹³ The increased participation in education, the outlay of large sums to the church and the emergence of a consumer society, demonstrated the region's relative prosperity. Also, these transformations highlighted the emergence of an affluent Catholic

⁸ *Report of her majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the acts amending the same, vol. iii: minutes of evidence*, p. 771 [C 2779-II], H.C. 1881, xix, 1 [hereafter cited as *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii... evidence...].

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 774.

¹⁰ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973) p. 82.

¹¹ *Census of Ireland 1881: area, population and number of houses; occupations, religion and education vol. ii: province of Munster*, pp 523-29 [C 3148], H.C. 1882, lxxvii, 1.

¹² *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii... evidence..., p. 774.

¹³ *Ibid*.

middle class who aspired to new models of respectability.¹⁴ These developments were in line with social changes common to much of Ireland during the period.

Although the richer northern unions experienced a more extensive growth in the standard of living, the region in the south of the county also benefited. By 1891 a farmer with a farm valued at £12 was considered at the higher end of the agrarian social scale in the Dingle region. From this holding he could expect an annual return of £68.¹⁵ Of this income, he expended £20 on groceries and a further £10 on clothing. The average dwelling of such a farmer consisted of a thatched house with a living room, kitchen and a loft. Nearly always, livestock occupied the kitchen.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the standard of living of farmers increased to some degree in the poorer unions. However, many of the small farmers in these regions relied on income from migratory labour. In Castlegregory, many went as labourers and farm servants to areas around Tralee and north Kerry. Similarly, young men and women from Killorglin left for the dairying regions of the county and also to Limerick and Cork.¹⁷ The flux of people to the areas of higher valued land in search of employment illustrated the contrasting economies of the two regions.

1.2: Politics: home rule and Fenianism.

At the start of the 1870s electoral politics in the county had been dominated by the landed gentry. Under an agreement since the 1850s, two gentry families shared the representation of the county. The Kenmare family held one seat while the Herberts of Muckcross controlled the other. By the 1870s both were in the Liberal interest (H.A. Herbert began his career as a Peelite in 1847 and became one of the few Irish born Chief Secretaries, although his appointment was short-lived, lasting between 1857-58).¹⁸ This traditional dominance by these two gentry families over parliamentary politics was effectively challenged in the 1872 by-election for the representation of the county.

¹⁴ S.J. Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth century Ireland* (Dundalk, 1985), p. 55. In this work Connolly offers an overview of the various arguments concerning the development of the Roman Catholic church in the post-Famine period.

¹⁵ Congested District Board: Base Line reports, county Kerry, Castlegregory, p. 641 (Trinity College, Dublin).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Base Line report, Killorglin, p. 653.

¹⁸ Brendan O'Cathaoir, 'The Kerry "Home Rule" by-election, 1872' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 3, 1970, p. 155; B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 284-85; J.F. Mangan, 'H.A. Herbert as Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1857-58' (unpublished M.A. thesis, N.U.I., Maynooth, 2005)

In 1870 Isaac Butt established the Home Government Association, which in effect created a new political movement behind the goal of home rule. Butt had previously associated himself with Fenianism through his legal defence of Fenian prisoners and his presidency of the Amnesty Association. He had also written on, and championed, the cause of moderate agrarian reform. In doing so, he managed to create a new 'coalition that embraced not only the artisans and labourers who had originally been attracted to Fenianism, but also priests and farmers who had remained aloof'.¹⁹ From this point on, home rule became the catch cry of Irish Nationalists and led to an immediate wave of home rule successes at elections. In 1871-2 seven by-elections returned home rule candidates and after the 1874 general election, fifty-four M.P.s supported the home rule cause.²⁰ During this initial surge in home rule popularity, it was the 1872 by election contests in Galway and Kerry that illustrated 'the place achieved by home rule in the politics of the Catholic counties'.²¹

The by-election was precipitated by the death of the sitting earl of Kenmare. Signalling an end to the trend of uncontested elections during the mid nineteenth century, a young Protestant land owner candidate, Rowland Ponsonby Blennerhassett (6,234 acres, Caherciveen), was nominated as a home rule candidate to challenge the traditional landlord and Catholic nominee, John A. Dease. Despite large-scale clerical and landlord influence, in one of the last elections to be held under open voting, the Protestant home ruler secured the seat. The electorate remained dominated by the better off sections of the farming community, with county voters required to occupy property with a valuation of twelve pounds or more.²² This group utilised the election to assert their political power. By the start of 1872 three farmers' clubs were in existence in the county. Located in Listowel, Tralee and Killarney the clubs represented the areas with the highest valued land in the county. No farmers' clubs were reported active in the poorer southern and western tracts of the county.²³ At a countrywide level such clubs predominated in the

¹⁹ Alvin Jackson, *Home rule: an Irish history, 1800-2000* (London, 2003), pp 26-7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²¹ R.V. Comerford, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Party, 1870-77' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A new history of Ireland, VI Ireland under the Union, II 1879-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 8.

²² K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1984), p. 466.

²³ See *Tralee Chronicle*, 9 Jan. 1872, 26 Mar. 1872.

province of Leinster, in eastern parts of Munster and in parts of Ulster.²⁴ This preponderance of farmers' clubs in the regions of the country with the most valuable land and largest farmers was mirrored in county Kerry. Farmers' clubs had a long history, but until the late 1860s had been little more than social organisations concerned with conviviality and improvements in agricultural techniques.²⁵ By the announcement of the 1872 by-election, these clubs had already begun to adopt an increasingly political tone. The most highly politicised club in the county was the North Kerry Farmers' Club and Tenant League. In August 1871, a number of months before the emergence of the by-election, the club resolved that 'we want to unite the electoral power of the club to return no member to parliament for the county... who will not pledge himself for home rule.'²⁶

During the run up to the election, the home rule candidate was able to rely on the emergence of an extensive organisation to promote his vote. A network of home rulers and tenant farmers successfully held a number of political demonstrations in his favour. Local associations were established in the towns of the county. The Catholic hierarchy vigorously supported the Catholic landlord nominee, Dease. However, many of the local clergy diverged from the bishop and supported the home rule candidate. During the run up to the election, a home rule priest, Rev John O'Connor, was removed from his parish in Lixnaw in north Kerry, and replaced by a supporter of Dease, Rev Higgins. After his removal a public letter from a number of his parishioners supporting O'Connor appeared in the press. The largest farmers in the region signed the letter. One of the signatories had a holding with a valuation of £146, another £160 while a third had a 124 acre farm.²⁷ These figures were representative of the large farmer class in the county. When the newly appointed Higgins attacked home rule during mass, the majority of the congregation walked out, illustrating both the popularity of the movement and the social power of the large farmers.²⁸ Furthermore, the landlord candidate was often met with violence. When he attempted to hold a demonstration in Castleisland town, accompanied by the parish

²⁴ Samuel Clark, *Social origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979), p. 255.

²⁵ Hoppen, *Elections*, p. 469.

²⁶ *T.C.*, 4 Aug. 1871.

²⁷ *T.C.*, 12 Jan. 1872, Valuation records, E.D. Ardfert (Valuation Office, Dublin). The three farmers were James O'Connell, Knockenagh, Florence O'Sullivan, Ballymacquinn, Thomas Egan, Tubrid.

²⁸ O'Cathaoir, 'Kerry "Home Rule" by-election', in *J.K.A.H.S.*, p. 161.

priest, a riot broke out. 'Dead dogs, cats and empty firkins were thrown at the party', which was eventually forced out of the town.²⁹

Despite landlord and clerical pressure, popular opinion and sentiment was largely with the home rule candidate. Blennerhassett easily won the election with 2,237 votes compared to Dease's 1,398.³⁰ In the northern region of the county, spurred on by the local farmers' club, eighty three percent of the 1,100 votes cast in the area went to Blennerhassett.³¹ The election demonstrated the importance of large farmers as an electoral force within the county. Aligned with the new home rule movement, which supported agrarian reform, large tenant farmers had the local power to compete with the traditional political patronage of both hierarchical Catholic clerical and landlord forces. Furthermore, in successfully promoting Blennerhassett's candidature, the tenant farmers and the home rule protagonists demonstrated extensive organisational skills at a local level.

This emergence of a new political power represented the politicisation of the Catholic middle-class within the county. The 1874 general election became a political battleground between the new home rule movement and the figures of landlordism and the gentry within the county. The election for the two county seats went uncontested with only the two sitting M.P.s nominated. Blennerhassett, representing the home rule interest and Herbert, the traditional Liberal landed gentry. The equilibrium established in the aftermath of the 1872 by-election was not threatened. However, the parliamentary borough of Tralee town became the focal point of the election. The longstanding politician and M.P., The O'Donoghue, was the sitting member for the borough. Although he had aspired to lead a nationalist movement during the 1850s and 1860s, by the 1870s he had become a peripheral figure on the national stage and remained aloof from Buttite politics and remained a supporter of Gladstone and Liberalism.³² A home rule candidate named John Daly was nominated against The O'Donoghue, who remained within the Liberal ranks. With 366 electors within the borough, only a fraction of the boroughs

²⁹ *T.C.*, 19 Jan. 1872.

³⁰ Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922*, p. 114.

³¹ O'Cathaoir, 'Kerry "Home Rule" by-election', in *J.K.A.H.S.*, p. 165.

³² For a brief overview of The O'Donoghue's life see R.V. Comerford, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47769> (1 June 2006). For a comprehensive analysis of his early

population, which reached over 10,000 in 1871, was entitled to vote.³³ Notwithstanding the socially exclusive nature of the electorate, the home rule candidate received much support within the town. In a public letter to the *Tralee Chronicle*, 134 signatories stressed their support for the home rule candidate and called for The O'Donoghue to resign. Out of a random sample of sixty-three of these signatories, only three had holdings valued at £4 or under. Twenty-nine of the number had holdings valued between £4 and £12 while the remaining thirty-one were valued above £12. Most of this group were representative of the urban middle class of merchant, grocer, and vintner.

Table 1.a: Value and number of holdings in Tralee Parliamentary Borough in 1874.

No of tenements valued at £4 and under	Valued over £4 and under £12	Valued at £12 and over
1009	319	308

Return for each parliamentary city, town, and borough in England and Wales, in Scotland, and in Ireland, of population and number of electors on registry 1866, 1869, and 1873, p. 3, H.C., 1874 (381), liii, 43.

Table 1.b: Valuation of holdings of sixty three signatories of a pro-home rule address during the Tralee Parliamentary Borough election, 1874.

Number of signatories with holdings £4 or under	Number of signatories with holdings over £4 and under £12	Number of signatories with holdings above £12
3	29	31
4.7%	46.1%	49.2%

Note: The sample was taken randomly from an address signed by 134 people in *T.C.*, 3 Feb. 1874. Valuation of holdings taken from; Valuation Books, Tralee E.D. (Valuation Office, Dublin).

As demonstrated in Tralee, home rule had gained the support of the rising lower bourgeoisie within urban regions. Their political appetite had grown and the home rule movement provided them with a constitutional, legal and political agitation to acquire increased social and political power from the upper middle and gentry classes. Despite the large support of home rule during the election, the traditional Liberal network in the town marginally returned The O'Donoghue by a mere three votes (143 to 140).³⁴ Unlike the farmers' clubs whose primary concern was agrarian reform, the achievement of legislative independence was the primary aim of these urban nationalists. Yet a degree of

political career see, idem, 'Churchmen, tenants and independent opposition, 1850-56' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, V Ireland under the union, I, 1801-1870* (Oxford, 1989), pp 396-414.

³³ Walker, *Parliamentary elections*, p. 119

common ground between the townsmen and large farmers was evident. The elections of 1872 and 1874 highlighted the increased politicisation of these two groups behind the home rule movement. In both the rural and urban political world it was the power of the gentry that townsmen and large farmers aspired to. Furthermore, both groups had social and economic ties. As Clark has established: 'the two groups shared a common religion, close kinship bonds, and the familiarities that developed through stable economic exchanges'.³⁵ Although the early home rule movement had 'considerable political potential' for uniting Protestant Conservative dissidents with Catholic Liberals in a popular platform, its most consequential effect on Irish politics was the political alignment of urban and rural middle class socio-economic groupings.³⁶

The most prominent political movement to emerge outside the early nationalism of the Catholic bourgeoisie was that of Fenianism. The movement alienated support from middle to large tenant farmers as it promoted the idea that a successful political revolution would result in the redistribution of land.³⁷ During the 1860s Fenianism in the county appealed 'predominantly to respectable wage earners and some of the urban lower-middle class'.³⁸ The high proportion of this group who supported the movement can be seen in an analysis of the people suspected of supporting Fenianism in Kerry during the later half of the 1860s.³⁹ The vast majority of those suspected by the police were involved in the commercial and industrial sector. Within this group, almost fifty percent were tradesmen and artisans signifying their lower middle class status. The failure of Fenianism to take hold in the countryside is illustrated in the fact that less than ten percent of the people suspected of involvement were in the agricultural sector. Within this group, no farm or agricultural labourers were identified with Fenianism. Those who did support Fenianism were largely farmers' sons, as opposed to farmers holding land. Of those arrested for involvement in the 1867 rising, it was reported by the local police that

³⁴ Walker, *Parliamentary elections*, p. 315.

³⁵ Clark, *Social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 263.

³⁶ Jackson, *Ireland*, p. 110.

³⁷ R.V. Comerford, *The fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848-82* (Dublin, 1985), p. 115.

³⁸ Comerford, 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of Fenianism in the mid-1860s' in *I.H.S.*, xxii, no. 87 (Mar. 1981), p. 242.

³⁹ Fenianism index of names, 1861-5, vol 1 (N.A.I., CSO ICR). This list was drawn up by the government after the suspension of habeas corpus in Ireland in February 1866 and included anyone suspected of supporting fenianism.

no farmer had been detained. The sole prisoner involved with agriculture in the county was a farmer's son who had returned from America.⁴⁰ The dominance of artisans, tradesmen and clerks was a common feature of Fenianism countrywide during the period. In Cork city it was apparent by the mid 1860s that Fenianism and artisans were intermeshing.⁴¹

Table.1.c: Occupations of suspected Fenians in county Kerry, 1861-69.

Occupations	Total	Percentage and number of suspects
Professional sector		1.8%
Teachers		1.8%
Clergy		0
Commercial and industrial sector		69.6%
Tradesmen and artisans		47.1%
Clerks and commercial assistants		20.7%
Urban labourers		1.8%
Agricultural sector		9.4%
Farmers and farmers' sons		9.4%
Farm Labourers		0
Unknown/unemployed		20.7%
Total suspects	53	100%

Notes and sources: Fenianism: index of names 1861-65, vol. 1 (N.A.I., CSO ICR); Fenianism: index of names 1867, vol.1 (N.A.I., CSO ICR).

Geographically, the support for the movement was confined to Tralee town and the southern half of the county. Killarney had the highest proportion of suspected Fenians with thirty percent from the town. Twenty-eight percent of suspects were located along the Iveragh and Caha peninsulas. The towns of Caherciveen and Kenmare had significant numbers while Fenian activity was also identified in the villages of Sneem and Waterville. The concentration of Fenianism in this region emerged out of a post-Famine 'commercialised economy [that] supported a small class of artisans and clerks in modest

⁴⁰ 'List of persons now undergoing sentences of penal servitude under conviction of offences in connection with fenianism, Jan. 1869': Fenian Arrests and discharges, no. 18 (N.A.I., Fenian Papers).

⁴¹ Maura Cronin, *Country, class or craft?: the politicisation of the skilled artisan in nineteenth-century Cork* (Cork, 1994), p. 106.

prosperity' in the south-west of Ireland from Clonakilty to Killarney.⁴² Fundamental to the prominence of Fenianism in this region was the inspirational figure of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. Rossa, who emerged as a central Fenian leader in the 1860s, established a Phoenix Society in the south-western Cork town of Skibbereen in 1856. Influenced largely by Irish-American nationalism, the society merged with the Irish Republican Brotherhood after a visit by James Stephens to the area in May 1858. After this, the society spread rapidly throughout the vicinity.⁴³ Although the police were successful in arresting a number of the society's members in Kenmare and Killarney, the organisation formed the base for the emergence of Fenianism in the region.⁴⁴ In the more prosperous northern part of the county, Tralee town apart, Fenianism failed to develop.⁴⁵

Table. 1.d: Geographical breakdown of suspected Fenians in regions in county Kerry, 1861-69.

Towns	Total	Percentage of suspects
Caherciveen		13.2%
Castleisland		1.8%
Kenmare		11.3%
Killarney		30.2%
Sneem/Waterville		3.8%
Tralee		15.1%
Tarbet		1.8%
Beaufort		1.8%
Unknown		18.9%
Brosna		1.8%
Total	53	100%

Notes and sources: Index of names 1861-65, Fenian Papers (N.A.I., Police and Crime Records). In this index names up until 1869 are included.

Despite the geographical limitations and the narrow social base of Fenianism in the 1860s, it had received a degree of popular support by the 1870s. Central to this feeling was a large amount of public sympathy with imprisoned Fenians after the 1867

⁴² Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 41.

⁴³ Ibid. Seán O'Luing, 'The Phoenix Society in Kerry, 1858-9' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 2, 1969, p. 6. This article provides an extensive account of the Society in Kerry.

⁴⁴ Index of names 1861-5, Fenian Papers (N.A.I., Police and Crime Records); O'Luing, 'Phoenix Society' pp 14-8.

rising. The trials that followed the rising 'left an impression in the minds of many people that it had been carried out by sincere and dedicated, if very foolish men'.⁴⁶ The nascent home rule movement of the early 1870s drew on this populist Fenian sentiment while also 'benefiting from the high level of national political awareness achieved by the Fenians and the Amnesty campaign'.⁴⁷ This fusion of Fenianism with home rule politics was clearly apparent in Kerry. Blennerhassett supported the Fenian amnesty movement as part of his election bid in a clear indication of the popular sentiment towards Fenians in the county during 1872. After his successful election he was the main speaker at an amnesty meeting in which banners representing the various trades in the town depicted the movement's strong artisan and lower middle urban class social background.⁴⁸ In turn, known Fenians supported the electoral home rule movement in 1872 and 1874.⁴⁹ At least one former Fenian prisoner, John Kelly publicly supported the home rule candidate in the contest for the Tralee borough in 1874.⁵⁰

1.3: Agrarian politics and the K.T.D.A., 1875-78.

After the 1874 general election the political impetus behind home rule began to wane. Although voters were supported the idea of home rule, a broad movement composed of local clubs and associations similar to those of the repeal era failed to emerge. Similarly, the public failed to become impassioned on the topic and importantly showed no great willingness to subscribe to its funds.⁵¹ As the popular sentiment surrounding home rule dissipated, focus became renewed on agrarian issues, and in particular, rent rises on estates in the county. Between the late 1860s and late 1870s landlords, eager to gain an increased share of the profit derived from the rise in prices for agricultural products, began increasing rents. Historical research has averaged that these

⁴⁵ For an account of the Fenian uprising in Kerry see O'Luing, 'Aspects of the Fenian rising in Kerry, 1867: I. The rising and its background' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 3, 1970, pp 131-53; idem, 'Aspects of the Fenian rising in Kerry, 1867: II. Aftermath,' no. 4, 1971, pp 139-64.

⁴⁶ Clark, *Social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 204.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *Ireland*, p. 110.

⁴⁸ *T.C.*, 19 Mar. 1872.

⁴⁹ Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 193.

⁵⁰ *T.C.*, 3 Feb. 1874; Return of persons arrested and discharges in connection with the Fenian conspiracy 1866-8 (N.A.I., Fenian Arrests and Discharges 1866-69, Carton 1).

⁵¹ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p. 110.

risers were generally moderate, increasing by or even below thirty percent.⁵² Within Kerry increases did occur during this period. Evidence submitted to the Bessborough Commission of the early 1880s, told that Wilson Gunn increased his rents on his Ballybunnion property by thirty-one percent. Similarly, a twenty-four percent rent increase was enacted on the Lansdowne estate in south Kerry and Lord Ventry also raised rents during the period.⁵³ On the Talbot-Crosbie estate in north Kerry, a systematic campaign to raise rents was in existence. As can be seen from table 1.d, in the twenty-two year period between 1855 and 1877 rents significantly rose.

Table 1.e: Annual rental of Talbot-Crosbie's estate, 1855-77.

Year	Annual Rent
1855	£5051
1860	£6611
1870	£7339
1875	£7824
1877	£8362

Source: Talbot-Crosbie cash book: (N.L.I., MS. 5036).

Although, as Donnelly has argued, Kerry was distinguished by a landlord body that were dedicated improvers and investors in their properties, and that the increases were 'rarely excessive', rent rises did cause considerable tension within landlord-tenant relations.⁵⁴ In 1875 a number of ejectment notices were issued against tenants of Talbot-Crosbie, who refused to agree to boundary changes and an increased rent on the estate, which were initiated a number of years previously. Meetings of the tenantry were reported and the parish priest, Rev Denis O'Donoghue, declared that Crosbie 'drew the sword against my people'.⁵⁵ By 1877 Crosbie had fully evicted at least three tenants in the previous two years over the issue.⁵⁶ Although low in number, the cases received much attention in the local newspapers. Tensions in the relationship between landlords and tenants in the county were further aggravated when the earl of Kenmare's new land

⁵² For a discussion on increases in rent on a general countryside-scale see, W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), pp 44-52.

⁵³ Donnelly, 'Kenmare' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 21, pp 18-9.

⁵⁴ For a discussion on Kerry landlords and rent increases in the county see Donnelly, 'Kenmare' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 21, pp 15-9.

⁵⁵ *T.C.*, 15 Jan. 1875 and 12 Feb. 1875.

agent, Samuel Hussey, began increasing rents on the large estate to pay for a £100,000 new mansion for the lord. Hussey attempted to increase the rents of six of the most prosperous tenants on the estate (all had farms ranging from seventy to 140 acres).⁵⁷ The tenants opposed the increase leading to a limited amount of agitation. By 1875 at least one of the tenants was evicted that resulted in a threatening notice appearing in Killarney town warning any farmer from bidding for the farm.⁵⁸

Publicly, relations between tenants and landlords were further soured when the north Kerry land agent, George Sandes brought libel proceedings against a large tenant named Thomas Bolton Silles of Lixnaw (he held 133 acres). At a dinner given by an absentee landlord named Henry B. Harnec in north Kerry to his tenantry, Silles referred to Sandes as unjust, dishonest and oppressive during a speech. In turn, Sandes sued for £3000.⁵⁹ Landlords and agents in the county set up a fund to support Sandes in what the *Cork Examiner* described as a 'sort of landlords' trade union'.⁶⁰ In turn, a fund was established to support Silles. The *Tralee Chronicle* supported the case and its editor, J.J. Long, emerged as the main organiser of the fund for Silles. Although the controversy centred on the north Kerry region, it came to be seen as a test of landlord-tenant relations in general. Meetings were held in the north Kerry areas of Causeway and Ardfert.⁶¹ The movement spread to other regions of the county and meetings were reported in the southern town of Killorglin.⁶² It was reported that subscriptions to the fund were coming from Tralee town: 'as every merchant, shopkeeper, and artisan is clearly identified with the prosperity or depression of those citizens [tenants].'⁶³ Contributions were made to the fund by the Cork, Clare and Limerick Farmers Clubs.⁶⁴ Held in Dublin, the case came to national prominence and Isaac Butt defended Silles. The moderate nationalist and tenant-

⁵⁶ Talbot-Crosbie ledger book (N.L.I., MS. 5037).

⁵⁷ *T.C.*, 13 Apr. 1875. This was the beginning of a campaign that witnessed Hussey increase the annual rents from £24,393 to £27,312 between 1875 and 1879, see Donnelly, 'Kenmare' no. 21 p. 38.

⁵⁸ *T.C.*, 14 Dec. 1875.

⁵⁹ *T.C.*, 2 July 1875.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Bryan MacMahon, 'George Sandes of Listowel: land agent, magistrate and terror of north Kerry' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, series 2, vol. 3, 2003, p. 15.

⁶¹ *T.C.*, 23 Mar. 1875 and *T.C.*, 6 Apr. 1875.

⁶² *T.C.*, 30 Mar. 1875.

⁶³ *T.C.*, 16 Apr. 1875.

⁶⁴ *T.C.*, 13 July 1875 and *T.C.*, 6 Aug. 1875.

right newspaper, the *Freeman's Journal*, highlighted the case's significance when it stated:

a number of landlords and land agents of Kerry have formed a sort of combination to support Mr Sandes... this is a matter in which all the tenant farmers of Ireland are directly interested.... Those who have backed up Mr Sandes have made this a question of landlord against tenant.⁶⁵

In the subsequent trial, a number of witnesses gave evidence to demonstrate Sandes' bad record as a land agent, including a tenant who claimed he was evicted after his wife refused Sandes' sexual approaches.⁶⁶ After the original trial failed to deliver a verdict, a retrial was called with the same result. The episode heightened landlord-tenant tensions. Furthermore, a political network of tenant-right organisers, based on rural and urban collaborations, was apparent within the county. Essential to the campaign to support Stilles was the publicity the *Tralee Chronicle* provided by reporting extensively on meetings and subscriptions. Significantly, the case was able to transcend the immediate and local and achieved support from farmers' clubs in the surrounding counties, the *Freeman's Journal* and Isaac Butt.

As landlord-tenant relations became increasingly strained a new tenants' organisation emerged. Unlike the North Kerry Farmers' Club and Tenants Defence Association (after the 1872 by-election the association became largely defunct), which had demonstrated its highly politicised tendencies during the 1872 by-election, other farmers' clubs in the county had not emerged as serious tenant-right organisations. As late as 1874, the Kerry Farmers' Club remained heavily influenced by landlords. During a meeting of the club in January 1874, H.A. Herbert M.P. (47,238 acres, Muckcross, Killarney), a small Killarney Catholic landowner named Daniel C. Clotsman (10,316, Gleflesk), and the land agent for the Lansdowne estate, Townsend Trench, were reported as attending.⁶⁷ However, tensions between these figures and tenant members became prominent. When it was reported that Herbert was taking eviction proceedings against a tenant in April and May 1874, members of the club attempted to expel him.⁶⁸ By June 1875, the club was disbanded and re-established as the Kerry Tenants Defence

⁶⁵ Cited in *T.C.*, 13 July 1875.

⁶⁶ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii... *evidence...*, p. 573.

⁶⁷ *T.C.*, Jan. 1874; *Land owners in Ireland* (Baltimore, 1988), pp 141-42.

⁶⁸ *T.C.*, 27 Apr. 1875 and 24 May 1875.

Association (K.T.D.A.).⁶⁹ The focus of the new organisation was clearly centred on tenant-right. It claimed that tenants had higher costs in relation to labour, standard of living and taxes which balanced against price rises, thus countering landlords' demand for higher rents. Farmers, who believed they were dealt with harshly by their landlord, were called to come before the association.⁷⁰ The association also pledged to undertake the legal defence of tenants that faced eviction, the return of M.P.s who advocated tenant-right and to make farmers more secure on their holdings.⁷¹

Although the association was a tenant movement, its leadership consisted of both farmers and townsmen. Its president, J.J. Long, was editor of the *Tralee Chronicle* while the association's secretary was one of the leading grocers in Tralee town, Thomas O'Rourke. These middle class townsmen had become increasingly politicised during the home rule by-election of 1872 and the 1874 contest in Tralee parliamentary borough. As the home rule movement lost its initiative, and particularly the local organisation that characterised its early election victories in the county, these townsmen channelled their energies into the emerging tenant-right movement. The rural members were made up of the large farmer class. The vice-president of the association, Jonathan Walpole, had a farm of over 200 acres.⁷² In January 1876 a public subscription was established to support the president of the association, Long. Out of a group of nineteen that signed the subscription, seventeen were designated as 'prominent farmers' in *Guy's Munster Directory* and at least three were Poor Law Guardians, indicating that they were among the largest tenants in their respective regions.⁷³ This group represented the elite within the tenant rural society. Such large farmers were 'politically conscious and experienced men who were influential among the tenantry'.⁷⁴ Feingold has outlined the emergence of these rural elites as:

during the quarter-century following the great Famine, then, there developed in Ireland an agrarian elite which dominated the social, economic, and political life of the farming classes... the large farmers-who constituted a new rural upper

⁶⁹ *T.C.*, 15 June 1875.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *T.C.*, 17 Aug. 1875.

⁷² *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii:.. evidence..., p. 805-7.

⁷³ *T.C.*, 25 Jan. 1876; Francis Guy, *Guy's Munster Directory* (Cork, 1886).

⁷⁴ Jordan, *Mayo*, p. 180.

middle class-turned to politics as a means of fulfilling their social and economic aspirations.⁷⁵

Furthermore, geographically the members of the K.T.D.A. were largely drawn from the northern richer region of the county. Although the movement was largely a local one, with little initiative from the central body, other regions within Ireland were also active. In 1877 associations and clubs existed in Kilkenny, Limerick, Ballinasloe, Wexford and Queens County. These regions, including north Kerry, defined the area containing the highest and oldest concentration of livestock farms in the south of Ireland, demonstrating a connection between tenant wealth and tenant political organisation in the 1870s.⁷⁶

Although dominated by the rural elite, the association attempted to induce all farmers to join. The association was acutely aware of the potential political power of the farming class. In August 1875 the association's secretary, O'Rourke, wished that tenant farmers 'could only be made conscious of the great power they could muster by uniting together and becoming members of the association'.⁷⁷ Despite the Tenants Defence Association's proclamations, the movement did not become widespread and within six months the association had a limited membership of one hundred. Its members complained that landlord harassment prevented tenants from joining.⁷⁸ In 1876 the Dublin based Central Tenants Defence Association sent a circular to all elected local government bodies, seeking a memorial of support for Isaac Butt's Land Bill. In what became a measure of the power of the tenant-right movement, none of the county's poor law boards adopted it. On the Tralee Board of Guardians the memorial was defeated on a vote of thirty-three to fourteen. Similarly, the Killarney Board of Guardians voted thirty three to nine to reject it. In both votes a large number of elected guardians voted against the pro tenant memorial.⁷⁹ The *ex-officio* landlords demonstrated that their power remained intact at local government level and over sections of the farming community. However, a degree of politicisation, not evident before, had reached the poor law boards as a result of the actions of the K.T.D.A.

⁷⁵ William Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland* (Boston, 1984), p. 72.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 71.

⁷⁷ *T.C.*, 3 Aug. 1875.

⁷⁸ *T.C.*, 14 Dec. 1875.

The K.T.D.A's largest success was achieved in early 1877 with a large public demonstration. With an estimated attendance of 10,000, the meeting highlighted the potential strength of a movement promoting the cause of tenant farmers. On the platform the various segments of popular opinion and politics within the general non-landlord society were represented. Twenty six members of the clergy, thirteen poor law guardians (all tenant farmers) and five members of Tralee's Town Commission were present. Significantly, a Fenian element was also represented with John Kelly, a former Fenian prisoner, and Michael Power (reportedly the leader of Feniansim in Tralee town) also on the platform.⁸⁰ Furthermore, both The O'Donoghue M.P. and Blennerhassett M.P. were also present.⁸¹ This was an impressive panoply of public opinion apparently behind one movement. Three years previously The O'Donoghue fought an election campaign against home rulers. Furthermore, the presence of Dean Mawe on the platform demonstrated support from the Catholic hierarchy, a group which bitterly opposed home rule in the 1872 election of Blennerhassett, who was also present at the meeting. The presence of radical Fenians further added to the political diversity of those who participated in the meeting. However, the meeting remained agrarian in tone with no reference to politics. The potential for disunion between the varying political stances was widely evident. In a meeting of the K.T.D.A leading up to the demonstration Michael Power led a deputation 'of Nationalists (Fenians) from Tralee'. He stated that while they fully supported the tenant farmers if Isaac Butt (he was expected to attend) spoke about home rule they 'would wish not to hear it'.⁸² Other political divisions also existed in the movement, with certain tenant farmer influences refusing to support Fenianism. This was depicted as early as December 1875 when a majority of members refused to pass a resolution supporting the amnesty of Fenian prisoners.⁸³

⁷⁹ *T.C.*, 12 May 1876 and 19 May 1876. The chairman on both the Listowel and Caherciveen boards refused to allow a vote on the issue.

⁸⁰ John Kelly was arrested for his involvement in Fenianism in 1865 at the age of twenty. At the time of his arrest he had no stated occupation, see *Fenian Arrests and Discharges 1866-69* (N.A.I, Fenian papers); In 1880 the police believed that Power always took the lead in Fenian demonstrations, see, *Report on the character of Michael Power*, 30 Dec. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1881 1221).

⁸¹ *T.C.*, 12 Jan. 1877.

⁸² *T.C.*, 2 Jan. 1877.

⁸³ *T.C.*, 14 Dec. 1875.

Despite the apparent unity of these varying groups during the demonstration, the K.T.D.A. soon became divided. Central to these divisions was the emergence of The O'Donoghue in the tenant-right movement. Although he continually failed to support home rule or the Irish Party, by 1876 he increasingly promoted tenant-right. In May 1876 he led the attempt to pass a resolution on the Killarney Board of Guardians supporting Butt's land bill.⁸⁴ In August he published a letter supporting the movement in the county's newspapers.⁸⁵ Sections of the leadership of the K.T.D.A. were apprehensive towards The O'Donoghue's involvement and resolved not to accept him as their representative in parliament.⁸⁶ However, The O'Donoghue's courtship of the association continued, and in September 1876 he, along with Blennerhassett, addressed the association and spoke in favour of tenant-right, and by the time of the Tralee demonstration he had become a member.⁸⁷ The O'Donoghue's membership of the movement quickly led to dissension between home rulers and his supporters. In February 1877 a meeting of the association became divided over The O'Donoghue's failure to support home rule and the parliamentary party. Several members such as Jonathon Walpole, a gentleman tenant farmer and vice-president of the association, promoted The O'Donoghue's position on the grounds that he supported tenant-right and insisted that politics should not be introduced to the movement.⁸⁸ In turn, the president of the association, J.J. Long, resigned in protest over The O'Donoghue's 'present attitude in the Irish cause, which is, to say the least of it, questionable'.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the Fenian section of the association, under Michael Power, took a similar stance to Long. In Long's place, a tenant farmer named John O'Flaherty who supported the O'Donoghue faction was appointed president.⁹⁰

By the start of 1878 the K.T.D.A. remained largely divided along political lines. Although all the members supported tenant-right, the issue of politics and home rule, and particularly the role of The O'Donoghue, continued to divide members. However, the political situation in Kerry and Ireland countrywide changed significantly throughout

⁸⁴ *T.C.*, 12 May 1876.

⁸⁵ *T.C.*, 18 Aug. 1876.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *T.C.*, 12 Sept. 1876.

⁸⁸ *T.C.*, 20 Feb. 1877.

⁸⁹ *T.C.*, 6 Mar. 1877.

1878. The home rule party was split as Parnell increasingly challenged Butt's leadership and throughout much of the year the 'New Departure' between Parnell and the I.R.B. was in the making. Significantly in Kerry, a school teacher originally from Castletownbere in south-west Cork named Timothy Harrington, established the *Kerry Sentinel* newspaper in April 1878. Although the newspaper's initial editorial stance concentrated on promoting the Catholic education question, it quickly began supporting the emerging politics of Parnell.⁹¹ By November 1878 the newspaper criticised the past failures of the Irish Party and promoted Parnell and his supporters as 'the party of action'.⁹² Commenting on Kerry politics, the *Sentinel* heavily condemned The O'Donoghue and stated: 'he is the worst enemy his country can have, so long as he holds aloof from the Irish Party'. The newspaper also criticised the K.T.D.A. for its support of The O'Donoghue and commented: 'when it becomes a question of glossing over his past political recreancy, or endeavouring to rehabilitate him in politics, we shall do everything in our power to oppose [the K.T.D.A.]'.⁹³ In a clear attempt to influence the policy of the association, Timothy Harrington, along with his brother Edward, had started attending its meetings by September 1878.⁹⁴

In the context of increased radicalisation of politics from 'above' by Parnell and the 'New Departure', and the emerging influence of Timothy Harrington and the *Kerry Sentinel* in Kerry, the K.T.D.A. invited Parnell to address it in November 1878. On the 15 and 16 November Parnell spoke in Tralee in a period which corresponded directly with the emergence in public of details of the 'New Departure' and Devoy's celebrated telegram offering I.R.B. support to Parnell.⁹⁵ When Parnell arrived in Tralee he was met by a deputation that consisted of Timothy Harrington of the *Sentinel*, the secretary of the K.T.D.A. Thomas O'Rourke, the leading Tralee Fenian, Michael Power, and a solicitor from the town named O'Connor Horgan.⁹⁶ Despite the K.T.D.A.'s invitation to Parnell, sections of its leadership remained apprehensive about the visit. The association's new president Thomas G. Pierse, a gentleman farmer from Causeway, continued to support

⁹⁰ *T.C.*, 20 Feb. 1877.

⁹¹ For the *Sentinel's* first editorial which concentrated on the education question see, *K.S.*, 26 Apr. 1878.

⁹² *K.S.*, 5 Nov. 1878.

⁹³ *K.S.*, 22 Oct. 1878.

⁹⁴ *T.C.*, 24 Sept. 1878.

⁹⁵ Moody, *Davitt*, p. 254; Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 225.

The O'Donoghue who he believed was: 'no doubt an advocate of tenant-right and... a brother member of the association'.⁹⁷ Walpole, the vice-president, stated that while he welcomed Parnell to speak on the land question, he was 'no home ruler' and warned that if Parnell 'went into other matters of course they couldn't be prevented'.⁹⁸ During Parnell's address to the association he outlined his views on the land question, which concentrated on Butt's moderate plan of settlement based on the 'three Fs' principle. He then spoke of what he thought 'was the most important issue.... [That] we have to contend with some 400 men in the House of Commons, who are determined to do that which is wrong to this country'.⁹⁹ Parnell went on to speak of the necessity of electing M.P.s who would be united and work behind his efforts in the Commons. Although Parnell didn't directly mention any of the Kerry M.P.s, some members in attendance criticised The O'Donoghue and a resolution was passed calling on Herbert to resign.¹⁰⁰ Significantly, Parnell concentrated on constitutional issues and advocated nothing more than the 'three Fs', illustrating that he had yet to develop his future radical stance towards the land question.

By the end of 1878 the K.T.D.A. remained divided. Members who were largely gentlemen farmers who supported The O'Donoghue, failed to substantially support either the home rule party or the emerging politics of Parnell. In contrast, other similar organisations such as the Ballinasloe Tenants' Defence Association, which under the direction of individuals such as Matthew Harris, were far more radical and supportive of home rule.¹⁰¹ Many of the rural members were increasingly drawn to The O'Donoghue, who was making continuous overtures towards tenant-right. This led to conflict with prominent urban based home rulers and Fenians, resulting in the resignation of Long from the presidency of the association. However, the increasingly prominent Parnell successfully achieved the support of this group, and significantly, the backing of Timothy Harrington and the *Kerry Sentinel*. While this development was highly important for

⁹⁶ *T.C.*, 19 Nov. 1878.

⁹⁷ *T.C.*, 22 Oct. 1878.

⁹⁸ *T.C.*, 12 Nov. 1878.

⁹⁹ *T.C.*, 19 Nov. 1878.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Gerald Moran, 'James Daly and the rise and fall of the Land League in the west of Ireland, 1879-82' in *I.H.S.*, xxix, no. 114 (Nov. 1994), p. 191.

future politics in the county, by the start of 1879 the association remained largely divided and acted little more than a debating club.

1.4: Agricultural prosperity and the land market in tenant-right in the 1870s.

A central reason for the failure of the K.T.D.A. to develop into a large-scale organisation remained the continued buoyancy of the agricultural economy during the 1870s. Although much debate has centred on the extent tenant farmers benefited from the post-Famine economy, and the level that rents rose in accordance, agricultural prices undoubtedly grew to a large extent.¹⁰² The key to the success of the agrarian economy was the region's high capability for dairy farming and in particular, butter production. The climate of the southwest of Ireland was ideal for the process of making butter during the nineteenth century. The coolness of the peak-producing summer months, enabled farmers to turn out firm butter capable of holding its original quality longer without the artificial cooling required in hotter climates.¹⁰³ As industrialisation in Britain developed rapidly in the post-Famine period, the demand for Irish agricultural produce such as butter, beef and mutton grew in accordance. In a period spanning from the 1850s to the middle of the 1870s the demand for butter in British cities created a 'seller's paradise'.¹⁰⁴ Kerry farmers took full advantage of this growth in the butter trade. Between 1847 and 1870 the number of cattle in the county grew from 131,000 to 211,986. Of the latter amount 113,799 were milch cattle, whose milk was primarily utilised for making butter.¹⁰⁵ In the immediate post-Famine period butter prices grew. In 1864 the landlord, Benn-Walsh, was informed by his land agent that in Kerry 'butter is [at] an extraordinary price and altogether the prospects of landlords and tenants [are] better than they have been for several years'.¹⁰⁶ Prices continued to rise and by 1871 the price farmers were

¹⁰² It has been argued that tenants benefited mostly from the post-Famine increase in agricultural prices, see generally, W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994); In contrast, other works suggest that landlords were the main beneficiaries of the post-Famine increase in agricultural prices, see; Michael Turner, *After the Famine: Irish agricultural, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1999).

¹⁰³ Donnelly, *Land and people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975), p. 138.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁵ *Agricultural statistics part ii-stock, table viii-showing the number of holdings and quantity of live stock in each county in Ireland in 1870*, p. 131 [C 880] H.C. 1872, lxix, 119.

¹⁰⁶ J.S. Donnelly, 'The journals of Sir John Benn-Walsh relating to the management of his Irish estates, 1823-64' in *J.C.H.A.S.*, no. 80 (1975), p. 39.

getting for their butter per cwt. had increased from 56s in 1851 to 93s.¹⁰⁷ The level of income that farmers derived from this product was high. In February 1876 tenant farmers got between £4 5s and £4 15s for every firkin of butter in Tralee.¹⁰⁸ On average a cow was expected to produce two firkins of butter every year.¹⁰⁹ Considering that over 100,000 milch cattle existed in the county, the return Kerry farmers got from butter was at the very least above £800,000 per annum. Unsurprisingly the parish priest for Listowel commented in 1881: 'all north Kerry is principally butter producing. The cow is the standard of produce'.¹¹⁰

A result of this prosperity in the agricultural economy, the value of land greatly increased. As demonstrated, landlords attempted to take advantage of this with rent increases that were particularly common in the 1870s. Although the issue of rent increases was met with a degree of criticism and outcry from tenants and their representatives, landlord-tenant relations were largely calm and stable. Serious agrarian disorder was not prominent. Between 1871 and 1878 only fifty-nine agrarian outrages were committed in the county.¹¹¹ Landlords did carry out evictions during the 1870s and between 1872 and 1875 201 tenants were evicted from their holdings, of which only forty-eight were readmitted.¹¹² However, in the three years between 1876-8 only fifty-two evictions were carried out in the county. Compared to periods of economic and social upheaval, such as the Great Famine, these were low figures. The low level of agrarian outrage and eviction, coupled with the failure of the K.T.D.A. to mobilise widespread tenant support indicated a level of stability within the rural economy. The increased rents did little to turn tenants away from land. In stark contrast, competition for land greatly increased during the period. Although the low level of eviction restricted a traditional form of access to extra land for tenants and graziers, the selling of tenant-right and farmer's interest in their holdings, created vibrancy in the land market. This provided open access to land for perspective speculators who were willing to outlay large sums of cash to obtain agriculture holdings.

¹⁰⁷ *T.C.*, 11 Aug. 1871.

¹⁰⁸ *T.C.*, 8 Feb. 1876.

¹⁰⁹ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii:.. *evidence...*, p. 761.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 759.

¹¹¹ Return of outrages, 1879-93 (N.A.I., CSO ICR, vol. 1)

Although the 1870 Land Act did grant evicted tenants the right to compensation, it did not amount to the right of 'free sale' or 'tenant-right'. The extent of 'tenant-right' outside Ulster has been a topic dealt with by historians. Donnelly has highlighted the restrictions and interference by landlords and land agents on the sale of tenants' interest, such as preventing public sales and insisting on certain incoming tenants. These limitations made 'the privilege of restricted sale much less attractive than the full-blown right of free sale'.¹¹³ Vaughan has argued that some form of tenant-right existed in the southern counties but was limited with small sums paid. He contends that 'before 1881 southern tenants had a potentially valuable interest that was only partially realizable through *sub rosa* payments and small donations from landlords.'¹¹⁴ However, David Steele has described a large trade in tenant-right right across Ireland during the pre-Famine period.¹¹⁵

The sale of tenants' interest and right was extensive in Kerry for a number of reasons. Firstly, landlords' ability to prohibit the sale of a lease by a tenant was limited. With the agriculture depression of the late 1870s tenants started to sell their interest to defraud creditors on the Kenmare estate. The estate's agent, Hussey responded by warning tenants that they must get permission from him to sell. When a number of tenants sold without his consent he moved to evict the yearly tenants but admitted that 'with regard to the leaseholders, nothing can be done'.¹¹⁶ The number of tenants who held their farms under lease had increased greatly in the county. Landlords such as Drummond (30,870 acres situated largely in the Castleisland region) attempted to induce all his tenants into leases and by 1873 the majority were under such agreements.¹¹⁷ The north Kerry landlord, Colonel Talbot-Crosbie believed that all tenants should have leases, and by the early 1880s the 'great majority' of his tenants were under contract with him.¹¹⁸ Increasingly, landlords forced leases on their tenants and often threatened unwilling

¹¹² *Return, by provinces and counties, of cases of evictions under knowledge of R.I.C. 1849-80*, pp 19-22, H.C. 1881 (185), lxxvii, 725.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 218.

¹¹⁴ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*, p. 80.

¹¹⁵ D. E. Steele, *Irish land and British politics: tenant-right and nationality, 1865-70* (Cambridge, 1974).

¹¹⁶ Donnelly, *Cork*, p. 217. Donnelly offers this as evidence of landlord restriction on tenant-right. It must be noted that Hussey only attempted to control sales after the emergence of the economic depression indicating that no such rule existed previously.

¹¹⁷ Drummond Estate papers (N.A.I., Rental Book, 1025/1/29).

¹¹⁸ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii... *evidence...*, p. 815.

tenants with eviction.¹¹⁹ In the neighbouring county of Cork, leaseholders had become 'the solid majority of Cork tenants'.¹²⁰ This large body of the tenantry, who were leaseholders, could sell their tenant interest with little interference from landlords. In one instance a tenant of Pierce Chute, named Maurice Kearney residing at Ballyroe outside Tralee, bought a lease after his landlord refused to give him the consent to do so. After signing for it, he merely got a friend to go and inform the landlord of his action.¹²¹ On the Trinity College estates in south Kerry the tenants interest was saleable 'subject only to a not easily maintained right of approval of the incoming tenant by the college'.¹²² It was also reported that on some estates a clandestine trade in tenant's goodwill existed. When a tenant wished to surrender a farm, the interested party paid him secretly, bribed the bailiff to supposedly carry out an eviction, who would in turn use his influence to secure the holding for the secret buyer.¹²³ However, such underhand techniques did not prevent the open sale of tenant-right, which landlords largely failed or wished to restrict in the county.

The sale of tenant-right was particularly prevalent on the Lansdowne estate in south Kerry. Although the estate was strictly controlled by the agent, William Stuart Trench, thirty farms were sold by tenants between 1867 and 1880. The value of the interest varied from twenty years rent to three years, with the average amounting to ten years purchase.¹²⁴ The sale of tenants' interest in farms was regularly advertised in the county's newspapers. The details commonly published included the acreage, annual rent and net profit.¹²⁵ 'Fines' were paid to buy the interest in a farm. At public auctions high fines were regularly paid to out-going tenants. In one particular sale in 1876 a tenant received £1,020 for a farm with a government valuation of only £21 10s. The high price was induced by the long lease of thirty-one years on the farm.¹²⁶ The prices that tenants got often varied. On another occasion, a tenant received £450 for a thirty-six acre farm

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 763.

¹²⁰ Donnelly, *Cork*, p. 210.

¹²¹ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii... evidence..., p. 808.

¹²² Robert McCarthy, *The Trinity college estates 1800-1912: corporate management in an age of reform* (Dundalk, 1992), p. 65.

¹²³ G.J. Lyne, *The Lansdowne estate in Kerry under the agency of William Stuart Trench, 1849-72* (Dublin, 2001), p. 194. This example was given before the Devon commission by a Tralee solicitor.

¹²⁴ Lyne, *The Lansdowne estate in Kerry*, p. 194.

¹²⁵ For example see *T.C.*, 14 Mar. 1876.

¹²⁶ *T.C.*, 25 Jan. 1876.

that had an annual rent of £48 5s.¹²⁷ When *The Times* of London journalist, Finlay Dun, visited the Kenmare estates in the winter of 1880-81, he found evidence of extensive sale of tenant-right by tenants. One tenant, with a lease of forty-one years and a rent of £82 received £1,000 for his goodwill. Another tenant with a similar lease and a rent of £35 achieved £850 for his interest.¹²⁸ Other evidence from the period further suggests that the sale of leases by tenants was common. In February 1876, the Knight of Kerry (5,372 acres, Valentia) provided an example of a sale of a lease of thirty-one years in which two years had elapsed. The lease of the farm, which had an annual rent of £70, was sold for £1,400. The Knight believed that he could 'multiply these examples'.¹²⁹ The high prices paid for the interest for farms was not restricted to the larger holdings. The parish priest for Molahiffe believed that rents for smaller holdings were higher because competition was more intense.¹³⁰ Correspondingly, the interest in a holding with a government valuation of £7 and a lease of one life was reportedly sold for £454.¹³¹ This was undoubtedly an extremely high price for such a holding. A more common price paid for small farms valued at £4 or £5 was £37, which was the average for such holdings on the Lansdowne estates.¹³² Although tenants with leases were in the most advantageous position to achieve high prices for their interest, yearly tenants also profited. According to Dun, a yearly tenancy on a farm in the Kenmare estate with a government valuation of £23 was sold for £120.¹³³ The sale of tenant-right was a common feature within agrarian society and the land market throughout the 1870s.

The high prices that tenants sold the interest in their holdings for indicated that despite the rent increases of the post-Famine period, land was rented lower than its market value. However, landlords also benefited from sales of holdings and leases. During one auction in 1875 for a thirty-one year lease, the out-going tenant whose agreement had expired was outbid by another tenant for the holding. A £525 'fine' was

¹²⁷ *T.C.*, 30 Jan. 1877.

¹²⁸ Finlay Dun, *Landlords and tenants in Ireland* (London, 1881), p. 79.

¹²⁹ Knight of Kerry, *Irish landlords and tenants: recent letters to 'The Times' and further correspondence on the above subject* (Dublin, 1876), p. 28.

¹³⁰ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii:.. *evidence...*, p. 818.

¹³¹ Knight of Kerry, *Irish landlords and tenants*, appendix.

¹³² Lyne, *The Lansdowne estate in Kerry*, p. 195.

¹³³ Dun, *Landlords*, p. 79.

paid to the landlord for a thirty three acres farm.¹³⁴ Leases were also sold by landlords with tenants still in possession. Jonathon Walpole (a large farmer and member of the K.T.D.A.) had his lease sold by his landlord, Henry Herbert, for a £400 'fine' to another tenant with two years remaining on it.¹³⁵ 'Fines' were also paid by sitting tenants to landlords. When a large farmer near Listowel named Flaherty, had his twenty-one year lease expire he paid the landlord a £200 'fine' for a new tenancy agreement.¹³⁶ 'Fines' were also reported as being paid when a lease was inherited on the death of a father or marriage of a son.¹³⁷ These instances demonstrate that landlords sold leases and received 'fines' from sitting tenants and thus benefited from the demand for land.

However, the high prices paid were laden with potential dangers. In the economically depressed 1880s, landlords were accused of 'living in fearful temptation from insane competition for land' during the previous decade.¹³⁸ Undoubtedly competition for holdings did inflate prices. Merchants and shopkeepers who benefited from the increased consumer society of the post-Famine period invested their profits in holdings for grazing purposes. When the Kerry Tenants Defence Association was originally established in 1875, it highlighted the emergence of this grazing influence in agriculture when it stated:

[high agricultural prices] brings parties forward who know nothing of the soil or of farming-such as merchants and cattle dealers-who have money to bid recklessly. These, and some of the landlords, are the parties who are sending the labourers to America, by turning their land into grazing, selling the meadows, and letting the aftergrass to dairymen.¹³⁹

Increasingly, landlords were turning to the letting of land for grazing purposes only.¹⁴⁰ For example, when Talbot-Crosbie of Ardfert evicted a tenant for giving his holding to his daughter's husband without his permission, he re-let it for nine months of the year as a grazing farm (commonly known as the eleven month system). The economic incentive

¹³⁴ *T.C.*, 30 Nov. 1875.

¹³⁵ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii:.. evidence..., p. 803.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 756.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 760.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 775.

¹³⁹ *T.C.*, 6 July 1875.

¹⁴⁰ Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution: Nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891-1921* (Oxford, 2005), p. 19.

for this was clear as the rent for the holding increased from £26 to £42.¹⁴¹ Also, the letting of land on the eleven month principle became more popular amongst landowners as it freed them from the legal obligations of the 1870 Land Act and subsequent land legislation.¹⁴² In the years preceding the outbreak of the land war, a significant amount of land was available on the land market. Tenants regularly sold their interest in their holdings for large sums and landlords began letting untenanted land on the eleven month system. Other available land on the market included landlord untenanted property, the small number of evicted holdings and holdings which tenants voluntarily surrendered.¹⁴³ These avenues provided access to land for ambitious tenants and provided the rural and urban bourgeoisie with the opportunities to invest in land and benefit from the high agricultural prices of the period. The availability of rentable land demonstrated the existence of an exuberant market which was often free of landlord control.

1.5: Credit system.

Another result of the post-Famine rise of agricultural prices was the emergence of a credit based economy. The nature of agricultural production, which left the farmer with one or two pay days in the year, created a culture of constant lending. Money and credit was lent by various sources, including mortgage brokers, banks, merchants and traders. Mortgages from banks and brokers were a common method of raising capital for tenants. Mortgage brokers advertised mortgages at low rates of interest with easy terms of repayment.¹⁴⁴ The practice of mortgaging holdings was even more prevalent in banks. One tenant who bought a new lease described the scene in a bank manager's office in Killarney town:

I suppose hundreds of persons in the county have done that [mortgaged their farm], for the time Mrs. O'Connor gave me the lease the manager went into a private room, which was all shelves, with papers on them, and pulled out the lease. I thought they were all leases then.¹⁴⁵

Lending from banks had particularly increased in the post-Famine period. The increase in

¹⁴¹ Talbot-Crosbie Ledger Book p. 431 (N.L.I., MS. 5037).

¹⁴² D.S. Jones, *Graziers, land reform and popular conflict in Ireland* (Washington, 1995), p. 127.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, pp 89-135. In a chapter entitled 'The Land Market' Jones extensively examines the supply of rented property, particularly focusing on the emergence of graziers and the eleven month system. However, he fails to recognise the sale of tenant interest as a significant factor in the land market.

¹⁴⁴ *K.E.P.*, 29 Sept. 1880.

¹⁴⁵ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii:.. evidence..., p. 808.

agriculture prices and the benefits of the 1870 Land Act gave tenants more security to borrow against. These factors facilitated an increase in the number of banks operating in the county. In 1863 five banks were in the county.¹⁴⁶ By 1871 this had increased to eleven while in 1881 sixteen banks had set up business. In 1881 Tralee had four different branches, Listowel three, and Killarney and Caherciveen two each. Castleisland, Killorglin and Kenmare all had a financial institution while Ballylongford had a sub branch which opened on fair and market days.¹⁴⁷ Competition between banks was intense, particular after the establishment of the Munster Bank in 1864 which threatened the National Bank's hegemony. In 1880 Samuel Hussey stated to the Richmond commission:

within the last few years in the county of Kerry, there were two banks [that] set up branches in all the small towns. They competed with each other, and gave out a great deal of money that had not previously been given to the country people, and thus they encouraged the smallest farmers to buy things that otherwise they might have done without... [increase in lending due to] the competition between the Munster and National Banks.¹⁴⁸

Farmers had widespread access to loans from banks during this period. Farmers with holdings with an annual rental as low as £5 were freely given loans of £5.¹⁴⁹ By the latter half of the 1870s lending from banks had become a common feature of the rural economy. The increased value of their holdings and the capital created by the high prices for agricultural produce provided tenants with the necessary security to acquire such loans.

Others borrowed money from private individuals who in turn often charged high interest. A hotel owner from Castleisland, named Maurice Murphy, believed that private money lenders charged up to thirty and forty percent interest.¹⁵⁰ Also, tenant farmers in Kerry often relied on cash advances from butter merchants, and particularly those in the Cork Butter Market. The largest market of its kind in the world, it averaged over 400,000 firkins a year, the majority of which was drawn from farmers in Cork, Limerick and

¹⁴⁶ *Thom's Directory 1863*, pp 1007-009.

¹⁴⁷ *Thom's Directory 1871*, pp 1224-2248; *Thom's Directory 1881*, pp 984-89.

¹⁴⁸ *Royal commission on depressed condition of agricultural interests; minutes of evidence, part I*, p. 628 [C.2778-1], H.C. 1881, 25 [hereafter *Richmond comm... evidence...*].

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 94.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 811.

Kerry. By 1880 between twenty and twenty four percent of the total value of the market supplies was on credit to farmers.¹⁵¹ In turn, these merchants charged high rates of interest ranging from ten percent, if paid within six months and twenty percent after that. As a result of these loans 'the farmers [were] completely in the power of the butter merchant as to the price of the butter'.¹⁵²

The most common form of credit received by tenant farmers was from local shopkeepers. Professor Baldwin described the emergence of shopkeepers as usurers to the Richmond commission as:

the growth of wealth led to the establishment of a great many banks; the banks gave money on easy terms to shopkeepers, and then the shopkeepers as it were, forced a system of credit upon the small farmers.¹⁵³

In turn, shops emerged as a central form of credit for farmers. Food, provisions, seed and clothing were all purchased from shops on credit. Shopkeepers freely gave out this credit, along with cash loans to create a dependent clientele who were in constant debt to him.¹⁵⁴

The system was described by a congested district board inspector in the 1890s as:

[credit] nearly if not fully paid for towards the end of each year, when a new account is started runs on to the end of the next year. Interest is seldom charged, but the price of goods is usually somewhat higher than they would be if sold to a cash customer.¹⁵⁵

By the latter half of the 1870s the agrarian economy was increasingly dependent on borrowing and credit. The steady rise in prices of agricultural products from the 1850s to 1876 created large sums of money for Irish and Kerry farmers. Many were willing to speculate further on agriculture and the price of land greatly increased. Landlords in general failed to intervene or prevent high 'fines' being offered for farmer's interest in holdings while on other occasions took advantage by demanding high 'fines' themselves. Much of the money obtained to pay for these holdings was raised on loan on the back of the high return available from agriculture. Landlords also put 'fines' on

¹⁵¹ Donnelly, 'Cork market: Its role in the nineteenth century Irish butter trade' in *Studia Hibernica*, no 11, 1971, pp 133-41.

¹⁵² *Richmond comm... evidence...*, p. 999.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 89.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Gibbon and M.D. Higgins, 'Patronage, tradition and modernisation. The role of the Irish "Gombeenman"', in *Economic and Social Review*, no. vi, 1974, p. 32.

¹⁵⁵ Congested District Board: Base Line reports, county Kerry, p. 362 (Trinity College, Dublin).

farmers in an attempt to get a higher return from their property and a larger share of money from the agriculture economy. Tenants were regularly indebted to merchants and shopkeepers and dependent on credit. Central to this economy based on loans and credit was the high prices of agricultural produce.

The level of lending and credit was exceptionally high and provided an extremely unstable base for the agricultural economy. Even during good agricultural years, large numbers were unable to meet the demands of their creditors. During years of poor agricultural output or lower prices, the payment of non-landlord debts often created extra pressure on tenant farmers. The high level of litigation in the county courts reflected the excessive amount of unpaid debts in the county. Shopkeeper, bank, butter merchant and landlord debts, were all heard and dealt with by the county judge during the quarter sessions. As the county court judge for the period 1870-8, Charles Hare Hemphill, stated:

in Kerry almost all the disputes between the tenants and peasantry come before the Chairman of Quarter sessions. Being so distant from Dublin, all the litigation is conducted in the county court.¹⁵⁶

The number of processes of civil bills applied for in the county court was exceptionally high. As early as 1869 1,179 civil bills were applied for in the county.¹⁵⁷ In 1876, a year of high prices for agricultural products, 2,398 were lodged.¹⁵⁸ The majority of these were for small sums of money. During this year the total amount decreed for was £4,978. Of this sum, £3,656 of the bills was for less than £5.¹⁵⁹ The proceedings of these small claims courts demonstrate the myriad number of complicated financial transactions within the credit economy. At a quarter sessions case in Listowel, it was heard how a shopkeeper from Listowel town gained a decree for £30 against a farmer who owed him three years credit. He got a bailiff to seize a number of the farmer's cows and sold them to redeem the money owed. In another case at the same sessions, a shopkeeper from Ballybunnion was sued. He had previously seized a heavily indebted tenant's hay for payment of money owed. However, a number of decrees were already against the tenant previous to the shopkeepers. In this case, the original creditors were suing the shopkeeper

¹⁵⁶ *Richmond comm... evidence...*, p. 998.

¹⁵⁷ *Thom's Directory 1871*, p. 909.

¹⁵⁸ *Thom's Directory 1878*, p. 659.

for the price of the hay, claiming they had first right to the tenant's assets.¹⁶⁰ At another quarter sessions in Tralee, the multilayered economy of the credit culture was further demonstrated. One case saw a farmer sue a shopkeeper for £10 for damage done to his cattle. He claimed the cattle were underfed in the county pound after they were seized for payment of a debt to the shopkeeper. In another case, a farmer sought a decree against another farmer for a £30 loan.¹⁶¹ Evidently tenant farmers were operating under large scale debt. The weakness and vulnerability of the credit system was demonstrated in 1873 when the heavy rains of the previous year led to poor returns in tillage and potatoes. The number of civil bills swelled to 3,716. However, the maintenance of high prices smoothed over any impending collapse in the economy.¹⁶²

Conclusion

The majority of the 1870s were characterised by a number of financial and political developments. The 1872 and 1874 parliamentary elections demonstrated the emergence of home rule politics in the county. Supported by varying non-landlord groupings such as Fenians, urban traders and enfranchised tenant farmers, the movement offered a direct political challenge to the power of landlordism. Despite the early success of the home rule movement, without the focus of elections it quickly dissipated within the county. However, the newly empowered socio-political group of a rural and urban middle class began further contesting the social and economic status of the landed elite. This invariably became concentrated on agrarian issues and particularly on a number of rent increases that were occurring on estates in the county. The mobilisation of this group led to the creation of the Kerry Tenants Defence Association in June 1875, which directly attempted to undermine the landlords' right to raise rents and evict and promoted a solution to the land question on the principles of the 'three Fs'. In 1877 the K.T.D.A. organised a mass demonstration in Tralee town when it appeared to have unified the Catholic clergy, home rulers and tenant farmers under the one movement. This success was to prove largely illusory as the movement became divided along political lines. The

¹⁵⁹ *Return of number of original civil bill processes served in quarter session districts in each county in Ireland 1876*, p. 3, H.C. 1877 (62), lxi. 329.

¹⁶⁰ *K.S.*, 16 Apr. 1879.

¹⁶¹ *K.S.*, 21 Oct. 1879.

attempts of The O'Donoghue to gain the patronage of the association led to fragmentation between urban home rulers and more agrarian minded tenant farmers. The emergence of the developing Parnellite politics, which at this stage attempted to concentrate politics on parliamentary issues, further divided the movement. The biggest obstacle to the principles promoted by the K.T.D.A. in the 1870s was the continued buoyancy in the agrarian economy. The high prices of agricultural produce ensured that landlord-tenant relations remained peaceful. Within the economy tenants demonstrated a large degree of independence from their landlords. This was particularly evident in relation to the vibrant market in tenant-right that was in existence, where tenants frequently achieved large sums for their holdings. As the tenantry entered a consumer and capitalist economy, they became ever dependent on credit. This provided the economy with an unstable foundation, which would eventually lead to economic depression and invigorate the agrarian principles formerly promoted by the failed K.T.D.A. to an unprecedented level of popularity.

¹⁶² Donnelly, *Cork*, p. 148.

Chapter II: Agricultural depression and the emergence of ‘radical’ agitation.

This chapter concentrates on the onset of depression in the agricultural economy and its effects on society in Kerry. Initially, the factors that led to the depression and the collapse of the credit economy are examined. Secondly, the reaction to the on-going distress by landlords and representatives of tenants is analysed. Throughout 1879 this reaction remained ‘moderate’ in comparison to the Land League orchestrated agrarian agitation, concurrently emerging in Connaught. Finally, the chapter analyses the development of Parnellite politics in the county and ‘radicalisation’ of landlord-tenant relations. It highlights the emergence of grassroots ‘radical’ activists who were largely non-existent in previous tenant leadership structures. These individuals provided a ‘radical’ spark to tenant politics and employed aggressive and violent tactics in confronting landlordism.

2.1: Agricultural depression, collapse of credit economy, and destitution, 1879-80.

The frailties and dangers of the credit based agrarian economy were highlighted with the onset of the agricultural depression in 1877. The poor season of 1877 and the continual drop in agricultural prices, particularly for butter, led to the lodgement of 4,056 processes for civil bills in Kerry in 1878.¹ In January 1879 the *Kerry Sentinel* highlighted the seriousness of the situation when it stated:

never since the appalling misery of the Famine years commenced to subside was the condition of the Irish agricultural classes so precarious as at the present time. A wretchedly bad harvest, with an almost general failure of crops, added to a considerable reduction in the price of the chief articles of farm produce have brought our peasantry to the verge of general bankruptcy.²

Ominously, butter prices continued to drop in 1879. In February, a month traditionally associated with high prices due to stocks being at their annual lowest, prices for a firkin of butter in Tralee fell well below £3.³ During the height of the ‘boom’, firkins fetched close to £5.⁴ Prices for store cattle also dropped and purchasing at fairs in the county was reported as poor. During the Ardfert fair in June, the selling of livestock was confined to

¹ *Thom's Directory 1881*, p. 659.

² *K.S.*, 2 Jan. 1879.

³ A firkin is equal to 40.91 litres.

local butchers and 'the buyers from the grazing districts who generally patronise the fair were conspicuously absent'.⁵ In the same month at the Tralee fair: 'there was a good supply of cattle of all descriptions; but from the scarcity of grass in the country, buyers were very few'.⁶ In an attempt to offset these trends, farmers in the county invested in rearing cattle less than one year (yearlings) in 1879 to benefit from high prices that existed the previous year. In turn, the number of yearling cattle in the county rose by over five thousand from 48,626 to 53,901 in the 1878-9 period.⁷ However, farmers who speculated on yearlings were further distressed when the price of such livestock fell by as much as fifty percent in 1879.⁸ In late 1879, the R.I.C. County Inspector believed that the low price of butter and 'the present low prices for young cattle, have been the immediate causes of the crisis' in the economy.⁹

Continuous wet weather during 1879 further exacerbated the agricultural distress. During the six months ending in September it was reported that on two out of every three days it rained.¹⁰ These incessant rains seriously effected crops. The quality of grass was greatly undermined, which further effected butter production and by September the number of butter firkins at markets was reportedly lower than previous years.¹¹ The over grazing of the land was also detrimental to the growth of grass. One journalist, touring the county for the *Freeman's Journal*, gave the following damning assessment of the practice of dairy farming in Kerry:

under the dairy system the soil has been drawn to a thread; it has been stocked and worked to the utmost point, and nothing has been returned to it. The land [had] been rich and luxuriant, and specially fruitful in the sweetest grasses, has been mercilessly dealt with. It has been overworked and exhausted... the wholesale pasturing and grazing of large areas of land without any rotation of crops or any considerable cultivation of roots... the making of butter and the traffic in it seems to produce a speculative and unsettled disposition... the tendency in all places where dairy farming prevails is to get as much as possible out of the land, and return nothing to it.¹²

⁴ K.S., 25 Feb. 1879.

⁵ K.S., 6 June 1879.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Thom's Directory 1881*, p. 691.

⁸ K.S., 21 Oct. 1879.

⁹ County Inspector report on the condition of the country, 31 Oct. 1879 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1880 34686).

¹⁰ *Preliminary report on the returns of agricultural produce in Ireland in 1879*, p. 14 [C 2495], H.C. 1880 lxxvi, 893.

¹¹ K.S., 16 Sept. 1879.

¹² K.S., 21 Oct. 1879. Article reprinted from the *Freeman's Journal*.

To some extent the land was exhausted by intense dairy farming, much of which was undertaken by investors such as urban merchants and cattle dealers.

The income obtained by tenants from butter production was hampered by a number of other factors besides poor weather and international competition. In July 1879 leading members of the gentry and prominent figures from the Kerry Tenants Defence Association met to discuss the butter crisis. At the meeting it was decided that the price of butter achieved by Kerry farmers was hampered by the low prices offered by merchants who held a monopoly in the Cork Butter Market. To counter this, it was proposed that they would export butter independently. The Cork merchants' dominance over the butter trade was a significant factor for some farmers in the county, particularly in the southern region. However, regular butter markets were in existence in Tralee, Listowel, and Killorglin, which provided an amount of competition. Of the 1,400 firkins that left Tralee during the height of the butter producing season only 600 were bound for Cork.¹³ With the development of communications, particularly railways, butter was increasingly exported directly from the county to the English markets. One Kerry landlord, Richard John Mahony of Dromore (26,173 acres), exported butter independently to London and achieved twenty percent more in price than he would have from the Cork merchants.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Great Southern and Western Railway Company offered special rates to anyone who wished to export butter firkins.¹⁵ The monopoly which Cork merchants had over many Kerry farmers was greatly reduced, yet this in itself created more difficulties. The smaller markets in the county failed to maintain the high standard of butter that the Cork Market was famed for. The painstaking inspection of butter, which the reputation of the Cork Market was founded on, was not as systematic in the Kerry markets.¹⁶ During late 1879 merchants who had attended the Killorglin butter market from Cork and Limerick reportedly left without buying anything when firkins were found to contain water.¹⁷ Also, the method of

¹³ *K.S.*, 29 July 1879.

¹⁴ *Land owners in Ireland 1876* (Baltimore, 1988), p. 143.

¹⁵ *Richmond Commission... evidence...*, p. 1062.

¹⁶ J.S. Donnelly, 'Cork market: Its role in the nineteenth century Irish butter trade' in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 11, 1971, p. 135.

¹⁷ *K.S.*, 25 Nov. 1879.

production in Kerry further undermined the price and quality of butter in the county. Due to the slow and small scale home production of butter, by the time firkins reached the market they were often sour. Also, this production made it impossible to achieve a uniformity of colour, texture or taste when sold in large quantities.¹⁸ All these factors undermined the quality of butter that farmers produced and in turn, the price they achieved.

The prolonged agricultural depression began to have serious consequences on the agrarian economy by late 1879. During the final quarter of the year it was increasingly clear that widespread distress, particularly amongst agricultural labourers and small farmers, was inevitable in the winter-spring of 1879-80. The credit system which had sustained tenants in the first years of the depression had exceeded its limits. As one witness at the Bessborough Commission in 1880 stated:

[during] the last three years the land produced nothing, the crops failed, and the farmer was buying all year round from first of November to the first of November again, and certainly he was not buying with his own money, he was buying from the shopkeepers on credit, and the result was that at the end of the three years the farmers owed a great deal to the shopkeepers, and they ruined the shopkeepers and they ruined everybody else.¹⁹

In October 1879, R.I.C. officials in the county believed that rent collection in the county was going to be paid with difficulty 'owing to the sudden cessation of credit'. The police were of the opinion that the pressure on farmers was intensified by their creditors pressing for repayment. It was reported that tenants had to sell their stocks to meet civil bills and writs for eviction leaving them nearly bankrupt.²⁰ By the end of September, tenant farmers in the county had £14,180 in judgements taken against them by their creditors during the previous nine months. In comparison, during the corresponding period in 1869 only £746 was decreed for against farmers in the county.²¹ A Local Government Board official in the Kenmare region believed: 'the small farmers... owe a large debt to farmers and others, who I will fear, look for their demands at the next

¹⁸ Donnelly, *Cork*, pp 170-2.

¹⁹ *Bessborough comm..., vol. iii:.. evidence...*, p. 811.

²⁰ County Inspector's reports in the condition of the country, 31 Oct. 1879 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1880 34686).

²¹ *K.S.*, 21 Oct. 1879. Figures republished from *Stubb's Gazette*.

October and January [quarter] sessions'.²² Indeed, large numbers of civil bills were issued at the quarter sessions in October (Killarney 592, Listowel 500 and Tralee 1,150).²³ With the credit system completely paralysed and poor returns from agricultural produce being achieved, the agrarian economy was on the verge of malaise.

The socio-economic groups that were initially most affected by the economic distress were the lower orders of agricultural labourers and small farmers.²⁴ By late autumn the impending distress amongst this class was becoming increasingly apparent. Heavily reliant on turf and potatoes, the yields from these were drastically reduced by the wet weather. Local Government Board inspectors believed that the distress would hit 'certain localities[more] than in others, amongst the small farmers and labouring class, where the potatoes are mostly bad, the turf scarcely fit for fuel, and no credit to be had at the nearest town or village.' The inspectors surmised that the poorest parts of the county, 'Caherciveen Union, parts of the sea-coast of Listowel and Tralee, parts of Dingle, Kenmare', would be affected the most.²⁵

In January 1880, the full effects of the distress became evident. Reports emerged of small farmers verging close to destitution and starvation. The L.G.B. inspector in Dingle believed that 'tales of the people re-digging their tillage in order to find any potatoes left behind in the first instance come from reliable and authentic sources'.²⁶ One figure from Ballybunnion, writing to the Mansion House Fund seeking relief, described the destitution in the region:

the surging crowds of deserving and naked poor who throng the streets every day seeking relief show unmistakably that dire distress prevails in the locality and that unless immediate relief be given and held on for some time there can be no alternative but the blackest Famine... the state of our poor is hourly verging on absolute destitution and the condition of the poor children attending our schools deplorable.²⁷

²² *Reports of the local government board of Ireland, with appendices, -eight*, p. 75 [C 2603] H.C., 1880 xxviii, 1.

²³ *K.S.*, 10 Oct. 1879, *K.S.*, 18 Oct. 1879, and *K.S.*, 1 Nov. 1879.

²⁴ David Fitzpatrick, 'The disappearance of the Irish agricultural labourer, 1841-1912' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vii, 1980, p. 70. This work highlights the similarities and overlap in the lives of small labourers and agricultural labourers.

²⁵ *Reports of the local government board of Ireland, with appendices, -eight*, p. 77 [C 2603], H.C., 1880 xxviii, 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁷ Ballybunnion relief committee to Mansion House Relief Committee, 17 Feb. 1880 (Dublin City Archive (D.C.A.), Mansion House Relief Fund Papers, Ch 1/52/320 letter no. 5).

Despite the earlier opinion of the L.G.B. inspectors that the distress would be confined to the poorer regions in the county, it spread into the areas that had larger farmers and higher valued land. In the Firies and Ballyhar region, lying between Tralee and Killarney, an area in the central lowland region of the county, which was characterised by good agricultural land, it was reported in January 1880 that up to 50 families were in need of relief. Also, the large farmer class in such regions, due to the scarcity of money, failed to employ labourers leading to extra distress.²⁸ Those larger farmers who had money, which they usually invested in their farms, in light of the depression lodged it as savings.²⁹ In the twelve-month period between December 1878 and December 1879 the amount of money on deposit in post offices in the county grew from £18,969 to £21,299, indicating that those with money were protecting it in savings accounts as opposed to investing it in their holdings.³⁰ During January 1880 the parish priest for the Firies region believed that the small farmers in the region were in dire distress. He stated: 'they are ashamed to make their privation known and yet are suffering hunger and want. In many cases they are much worse off than the labourers who make their wants known publicly'.³¹ The distress of late 1879 affected the small farmers and labourers to the greatest extent. In contrast to the destitution of this grouping, it was mostly a time of privation for larger tenants.

2.2: Reaction to the distress

During 1879 the distress of the small farmers and labourers was somewhat diverted by the actions of the government, landlords and the dispersion of private charity. A number of landlords readily reduced their rents. As early as July 1879 seven landlords

²⁸ Firies relief committee to Mansion House Relief Committee, 20 Jan. 1880 (D.C.A., Mansion House Relief Fund Papers, Ch 1/52/513 letter no. 1).

²⁹ *Special commission act, reprint of the shorthand notes of the speeches, proceedings, and evidence taken before the commissioners appointed under the above act, vol. 1* (London, 1890), p. 544.

³⁰ *Return, arranged according to counties, showing the number of accounts of depositors in Post Office Savings Banks in the U.K. remaining open on the 31 Dec. 1879, with the amount, inclusive of interest, standing to the credit of those accounts*, H.C., 1881 (24), lvii, 335.

³¹ Firies relief committee to Mansion House Relief Committee, 20 Jan. 1880 (D.C.A., Mansion House Relief Fund Papers, Ch 1/52/513 letter no. 4).

were reported as giving abatements in rent.³² After Wilson Gunn granted a twenty percent abatement in rent his agent, Cussen, was deemed 'excellent and popular' by the *Kerry Sentinel*.³³ Lord Ventry also gave a twenty percent abatement on the March and November gales.³⁴ The government were slow to respond to the distress with no initiatives to relieve the distress until the start of 1880. In January, the government granted up to £500,000 in loans to landlords and local authorities to undertake improvement projects, and thus provide employment. The following month another grant of £250,000 was made for the same purpose.³⁵ Dispersed through the Board of Works, landlords in Kerry were attracted to this government money and between November 1879 and January 1880 they applied for £164,353. Similarly the sanitary authorities sought £12,280. With a limited amount available, the government sanctioned £74,393 to baronies in Kerry. However, the money was dispersed slowly and by late March only £13,565 was made available to Kerry landowners.³⁶ In turn, relief works were established in some regions. Lord Listowel opened up works on various parts of his estate where it was reported that as a result: 'his lordship is spoken of with great gratitude in the homes of these poor people'.³⁷ Notwithstanding the Board of Works' initial slowness to grant loans, larger sums were given after March. By October 1880, 277 loans totalling £203,733 had been granted in the county. Until the start of the harvest in September, 6,396 labourers and tenants were employed by their landlords in relief works.³⁸

Notwithstanding the apparent success of the government relief works, a number of problems with the process were apparent. Landlords attempted to offload much of the cost on the tenants by including the interest charged on the loans onto their rents.³⁹ Landlords offered out the relief money directly to farmers on rates of interest that the

³² *K.S.*, 8 July 1879. These included Daniel Coltsmann, Glenflesk, J.R. Leahy, Daniel Brennan, Droumhall, M.J. O'Connell Lake view, D.J. O'Connell Grenagh, Wilson Gunn Rattoo, G.R. Brown, Caherdown,

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *K.S.*, 1 Aug. 1879.

³⁵ Virginia Crossman, "'With the experience of 1846 and 1847 before them": the politics of emergency relief, 1879-84' in Peter Gray (ed.) *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837-1901* (Dublin, 2004), p. 175.

³⁶ *Return of applications from landed proprietors and sanitary authorities in scheduled unions for loans under notices of Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland, 22 Nov. 1879-12 Jan. 1880, with result*, p. 4, H.C. 1880 (154), lxii.

³⁷ *K.S.*, 6 Jan. 1880.

³⁸ Returns of relief of distress: county Kerry, 23 Oct. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1880 26726/25850).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

increasingly insolvent tenants refused to take. For example, tenants of Lord Headley (12,769 acres Aghadoe House, Killarney) declined an offer of £2,000 on loan at an interest of six and a half percent.⁴⁰ While many landlords did offer relief work on their estates others failed to provide any. This was demonstrated in the Brosna region where only one of the twelve landlords, an absentee named Richard Drummond (29,780 acres, London), in the area provided relief work.⁴¹ Also landlords endeavoured to offer the relief works to tenants they were friendly with, as opposed to those that were most necessitous.⁴² These factors undermined the relief effort to some extent.

The government also attempted to use the poor law system to relieve the distress. Entry to the workhouse remained highly unpopular and for many was to be avoided at all costs. Despite the large increase in distress between January and June in 1880 the numbers in the six workhouses in the county dropped from 1,932 to 1,802 (this was normal seasonal patterns) indicating that those who were suffering from distress were not turning to the workhouse.⁴³ Importantly, the government relaxed the restrictions on granting outdoor relief to enable guardians to relieve the small landholders outside the workhouse (previously only those who occupied less than a quarter acre could gain outdoor relief).⁴⁴ Correspondingly during the first six months of 1880, the number of people receiving out-door relief grew from 778 to 1,339 in the county.⁴⁵ However, this remained a low number and out-door relief didn't materialise into a major source of relief for the large numbers of destitute people in the county. The most effective and practical measure that was introduced through the poor law system was the supply of seeds to tenants for the growing of oats and potatoes. Under the Seed Supply Act, passed on 1 March 1880, guardians in distressed districts got interest free loans for the purchase of seed potatoes for distribution amongst tenants. This was an important measure as tenants had been previously forced to eat their seed from a lack of other food, thus using up the

⁴⁰ K.S., 20 Jan. 1880; *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 142.

⁴¹ K.S., 20 Jan. 1880; *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 142.

⁴² Crossman, 'The politics of emergency relief, 1879-84' p. 178.

⁴³ *Return of numbers in receipt of relief in the several unions in Ireland on 1 Jan., 1 Mar., and 1 June, in 1878, 1879, and 1880*, p. 23, H.C., 1880 (420), lxii, 289.

⁴⁴ Crossman, 'The politics of emergency relief, 1879-84' p. 175; *Circular of 7 Feb. 1880, issued by the Local Government Board for Ireland to boards of guardians, relating to the relief to families of persons occupying land*, H.C., 1880 (9), lvii, 705.

⁴⁵ *Return of numbers in receipt of relief in the several unions in Ireland... 1880*, p. 23.

necessary stock for replanting.⁴⁶ In turn, £26,584 worth of seed was distributed by boards of guardians in the county to tenants.⁴⁷

Of greater significance to the emergence of tenant politics was the development of local relief committees. These bodies sought charity from sources such as the Marlborough Fund and the Irish National Land League. However, the largest private body to dispense relief was the Mansion House Fund. By 1880 forty-six local relief committees in the county were in receipt of aid from this body.⁴⁸ These committees, which distributed £9,415 in relief during the first nine months of 1880, provided the popular response from the local non-gentry community to the distress of the small farmers and labourers. These committees were composed of the leading figures in each locality. Each committee had to include clergymen of all denominations, local poor law guardians and the medical officer from the dispensary. The Dublin Mansion House Committee paid scrupulous attention to the composition of each committee, only granting aid when specific instructions were compiled with.⁴⁹ Despite this, the committees became influenced, and to a large extent controlled, by Catholic clergy, 'strong' farmers, merchants and shopkeepers. Of the five hundred individuals that sat on the committees in the county, eighty-two were Catholic clergy, twenty-one clergy from other denominations, twenty-nine medical officers, seventy-two poor law guardians while the remaining 296 were 'other lay members'.⁵⁰ Although the local gentry did at times lead the committees, such as in Ardfert where the chairman was the largest local landlord, Talbot-Crosbie and the secretary, his land agent, Trench, the bodies were largely in the hands of the Catholic middle classes.⁵¹ In the Firies and Ballyhar committee, the local parish priest, Fr O'Connor was chairman and his curate was secretary. Large farmers such as John O'Connor Curtin, who held a 258-acre farm valued at £167, sat on the

⁴⁶ G.P. Moran 'Famine and the land war: relief and distress in Mayo, 1879-81, part II' in *Cathair na Mairt: Journal of the Westport Historical Society*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1986, p. 112.

⁴⁷ *Report of the Local Government Board for Ireland with appendices, -ninth*, p. 127, H.C., 1881 [C.2926], xlvii, 269.

⁴⁸ Mansion House Relief Committee, *The Irish crisis of 1879-80: proceedings of the Dublin Mansion House Relief Committee, 1880* (Dublin, 1881), pp 307-8.

⁴⁹ J.W.H. Carter, *The land war and its leaders in Queen's County, 1879-82* (Portlaoise, 1994), p. 34.

⁵⁰ *The Irish crisis of 1879-80*, p. 311.

⁵¹ Ardfert Relief Committee to Mansion House Committee, 1 Jan. 28 1880 (D.C.A., Mansion House Relief Fund Papers, Ch1/52/206 letter no. 1).

committee.⁵² In Ballybunnion, the Catholic parish priest was chairman; the local schoolteacher was secretary, while two merchants from Ballybunnion village acted as the treasurers. The committee was composed of eight poor law guardians along with the local rector, doctor and one gentry figure.⁵³ At times the committees acted as a source of patronage and influence for these figures. In the Annauscaul region, allegations were made by figures from the sub-district of Minard that relief money was not been distributed to their area and that it was being given to friends of the committees, some of who had the 'grass of ten to twelve cows'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the relief tickets were for local shopkeepers and merchants businesses, many of whom were members of the committees.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding such discrepancies, these committees demonstrated that an extensive local leadership structure was in existence in regions across the county. Drawn from the Catholic middle classes, these figures were in a position to offer leadership to the mass of the tenant body.

2.3: Political reaction to the distress 1879.

Despite the extensive distress amongst the small farmers and agricultural labourers the situation failed to become politicised or radicalised during the 1879-80 winter. In county Mayo this group, under similar economic strain, provided the impetus behind the emergence of a land agitation, which famously began with a mass meeting in Irishtown in April 1879. In turn, small farmers and agricultural labourers, heavily influenced and organised by Fenians, set off the land war in Connaught.⁵⁶ However, no similar agitation developed in county Kerry in 1879, and it wasn't until the latter half of 1880 that the Land League emerged in the county.

The political reaction to the impending distress from the tenant population began with a meeting in Sneem in February 1879. It was called in response to the serving of an ejectment notice on a farmer on the estate of F.C. Bland (25,576 acres, Derryquinn

⁵² Ibid, Ch1/52/513 letter 1; Valuation Office (Dublin, Valuation records).

⁵³ Ballybunnion relief committee to Mansion House Committee (D.C.A., House Relief Fund Papers, Ch 1/52/320 letter no. 1).

⁵⁴ Letter from Minard to Mansion House Relief Committee (D.C.A. Mansion House Relief Fund Papers, CH 1 /52/357, letter no. 13).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Donald Jordan, *Land popular and politics in Ireland: county Mayo from the plantation to the land war* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 209-229.

Castle, Sneem).⁵⁷ The crowd was informed by the local parish priest, Rev O'Halloran that landlords had to be prevented from raising rents and carrying out evictions.

Corresponding to contemporary moderate thought on the land question, support was offered to Butt's land bill.⁵⁸ However, more direct action was also promoted when O'Halloran proposed to socially ostracise individuals that attempted to gain possession of another tenant's holding. The priest declared that 'a man who comes in and offers an excessive rent, thereby forcing its occupiers to surrender it, such a man is an enemy to the community, and he should be treated as an enemy'.⁵⁹ Opposition to evictions, rent increases and the promotion of moderate land reform were common demands' of tenant organisations throughout the 1870s, including the K.T.D.A. Such demands did not amount to the emerging radicalism of the anti-landlord agitation in Connaught. As 1879 wore on moderate influences appeared to be directing any dissent concerning the continual distress in the agrarian economy. By June the Catholic clergy in the county took the lead. After a conference of the clergy of the deanery of Tralee, the following statement was issued:

The prevailing distress we believe to be owing principally to the following causes:-In the first place to excessive rents. For the last twenty years there has been a very gradual and steady increase of rents... [and] now that the prices of all kinds of agricultural produce have fallen thirty percent they find it utterly impossible to meet the extravagant rents... when we add to this that the wages of farm labourers and servants, and the expense of their support has trebled for the last few years we can form a fair idea of the difficulties with which agriculturists have to contend.⁶⁰

The address then demanded for landlords to reduce rents.⁶¹ Within a week similar statements were issued by leading Catholic clergy in Dingle and Caherciveen.⁶² The middle and large farmer orientation of the clergy's addresses was easily visible. Articulating the reasons for landlords to reduce rent, the loss in agricultural revenue and significantly, the high expense of labourers and servants (small farmers didn't hire labour and often acted as labourers themselves), were cited. The Caherciveen clergy provided a

⁵⁷ *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 141.

⁵⁸ Butt's land bill was tabled in 1876 and remained the policy of the moderate section of the Irish Party.

⁵⁹ *K.S.*, 14 Feb. 1879.

⁶⁰ *K.S.*, 6 June 1879.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *K.S.*, 13 June 1879 and 17 June 1879.

balance sheet of a farmer to demonstrate the loss they were operating under. Indicating the large farmer bias of the higher clergy, the example was for a farmer who had an annual rent of £104 in a union where eight-three percent of farms were valued under £10.⁶³

Despite the growing depression no land meeting occurred for another six months until September 1879. Held in Listowel, the meeting illustrated the continued moderate opinion of tenant activists in the county. Rowland Ponsonby Blennerhassett M.P. headed the meeting. He had failed to side with Parnell and remained within the moderate wing of the Irish Party, which were characterised by distaste of the politics and radicalism of the Land League.⁶⁴ A large number of Catholic clerics and poor law guardians were also present on the platform. Resolutions were passed calling on landlords to reduce rents. The concerns of creditors, whom the small farmers were so much in debt to, were also addressed. This was illustrated when Rev McMahan warned: 'merchants, bankers and traders will be forced to close in on farmers' debts if landlords were not willing to reduce rents'.⁶⁵ Importantly, the emerging Parnellite and editor of the *Kerry Sentinel*, Timothy Harrington attended the meeting. In an editorial in the *Sentinel* leading up to the meeting, he complained that they were unable to amend the proposed resolutions, which avoided radical demands and concentrated on traditional tenant-right objectives. However, he did call for support for the meeting and deemed that 'tenant-right meetings are the new rule throughout Ireland'.⁶⁶ Notwithstanding Harrington's grasp of the prevailing agitation emerging countywide, the political response in the county remained moderate. In November a meeting called to meet the distress in Caherciveen resonated with moderation. A large number of Catholic clerical figures, accompanied by Blennerhassett M.P., and a number of shopkeepers and merchants from the town attended the meeting. Furthermore, Daniel O'Connell (17,394 acres, Derrynane) and the land agent to the Trinity College estates in the region, Captain Needham, also attended.⁶⁷ Needham promised to write to the College asking for them to go lightly on the tenants, and resolutions were passed calling on the government to open public works to meet the

⁶³ *K.S.*, 13 June 1879.

⁶⁴ Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 232.

⁶⁵ *K.S.*, 26 Sept. 1879.

⁶⁶ *K.S.*, 23 Sept. 1879.

distress.⁶⁸ The law agent of the college estates later reprimanded Needham and warned him that his comments 'will embarrass you in getting in rents from those who can pay'.⁶⁹ Despite this, the presence of a local landlord and agent at a meeting to address the distress of the period contrasted greatly to the increasingly radical and violent anti-landlord and 'no rent' agitation in the 'west'.

As 1879 came to an end tensions continued to grow within agrarian society. Despite some efforts by landlords to respond favourably to tenant demands by opening relief works and the granting of rent abatements, many increasingly turned to the threat of eviction. In September the increasingly bellicose land agent Samuel Hussey warned tenants on Lord Headley's estate with legal proceedings if they failed to pay their rent.⁷⁰ On Lord Mounteagle's lands the tenants refused to pay rent without a reduction resulting in legal action being taken against them.⁷¹ By December T. A. Stoughton issued sixty ejectment notices against tenants for non-payment of rent on his estate.⁷² In all, 260 ejectment notices were sought by landlords in the county for non-payment of rent in 1879.⁷³ Furthermore, the number of evictions had increased to seventy for 1879 compared to twenty-six in 1878, and seventeen in 1877.⁷⁴ In turn, there appeared a desire amongst tenants to organise and agitate over the issue of rent. In late October 1879, tenants of Lord Kenmare attempted to form a meeting to discuss rent payment. However, the demonstration fell through when no leaders attended to address it.⁷⁵ The *Sentinel* promulgated the necessity for agitation. In December it explained to its readers:

in Galway, Mayo, Clare, Tipperary, Sligo and other counties vigorous agitation, monster land meetings, and outspoken language have brought in their train numerous reductions of rent. In Kerry, where no agitation exists... there are no reductions.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 144.

⁶⁸ *K.S.*, 7 Nov. 1879.

⁶⁹ McCarthy, *Trinity*, p. 58.

⁷⁰ *K.S.*, 30 Sept. 1879.

⁷¹ *K.S.*, 12 Sept. 1879.

⁷² *K.S.*, 23 Dec. 1879.

⁷³ *Return of number of families evicted other than for non-payment of rent, 1877-79; Return of number of civil bill ejectments entered, tried and determined in Ireland, 1877-79*, p. 5, H.C., 1880 (132), lx, 379.

⁷⁴ *Return of cases of eviction which have come under the knowledge of the constabulary in each of the four quarters of 1877, 1878, 1879, and the first quarter of 1880 and up to the 10 June 1880*, H.C., 1880 (245), lx, 361.

⁷⁵ *K.S.*, 21 Oct. 1880.

By the start of 1880 there was a lack of credible leadership and organisation within the county to orchestrate any form of anti-rent agitation. The demonstrations held were largely of a 'moderate' nature and failed to mobilise tenants or force landlords to concede to their demands. The divisions within the K.T.D.A. made the body redundant. It had not met since July 1879 when supporters of the land agent Samuel Hussey succeeded in passing resolutions favourable to him.⁷⁷ Within this leadership vacuum The O'Donoghue attempted to place himself at the head of any nascent tenant movement. In November 1879 he published an open letter in various regional and local newspapers promoting a tenant meeting in Killarney. He called on the 'farmers of the Killarney district to assemble... in order to express their determination to hold their farms for ever, subject to the payment of a fair rent'. He also claimed that Parnell and O'Connor Power would attend.⁷⁸ The O'Donoghue's political history, which included defeating a home rule candidate in the 1874 general election, and his failure to support either side of the Irish Party, made his attempt to lead a tenant movement in Kerry somewhat controversial. One letter published in the county's newspapers noted: 'it is amusing to see him now at war with those who were hand and glove with him at the late county and borough elections'.⁷⁹ The *Kerry Sentinel* criticised his role in 'the active parliamentary session... the voice of Tralee's member is not once heard in support of the Nationalist demands.... The people of Tralee are once again reminded of the sorry figure they are made to cut in Irish politics'.⁸⁰ Opposition to The O'Donoghue from radical figures in the county was also apparent. On the day of the demonstration a band from the Causeway region *en route* to Killarney for the meeting were stopped at Tralee railway station by an ex-Fenian and prominent home ruler named John Kelly. After being advised by Kelly, the band returned home without attending the meeting.⁸¹ At the demonstration itself, neither Parnell nor O'Connor Power were in attendance and the Catholic clergy failed to attend. The *Kerry Sentinel* reported that 'nothing... would testify to general enthusiasm for the meeting'.⁸² However, a crowd of over 4,000 attended, which comprised of figures such as Thomas

⁷⁶ *K.S.*, 5 Dec. 1880.

⁷⁷ *K.S.*, 8 July 1880.

⁷⁸ *K.S.*, 18 Nov. 1880.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *K.S.*, 6 Jan. 1880.

O'Rourke, secretary of the defunct K.T.D.A, and O'Connor Horgan, a noted Tralee solicitor and Nationalist. Individuals from other parts of the county such as J. O'Sullivan from the north Kerry town of Ballylongford were also reported as in attendance, indicating that the meeting appealed to individuals outside of the Kenmare estate.⁸³ Despite the *Sentinel's* opposition to the meeting and the lack of support from Catholic clergy and local and national home rulers, it was to some degree a success.

In his speech, The O'Donoghue demanded that rents should be set by arbitration between landlord and tenant; tenants should secure the right to sell their interest, and that landlords be prevented from increasing rent on tenants' improvements.⁸⁴ These demands were closely related to those of Isaac Butt's Land Bill, which still remained the legislative proposal on land of Shaw and the Home Rule Party.⁸⁵ He also directly referred to and criticised a number of landlords including Lord Kenmare, H.E. Herbert and the land agent, Samuel Hussey. Furthermore, resolutions demanding a rent reduction and significantly, peasant proprietorship were passed indicating the influence of the principles of the newly established Irish National Land League.⁸⁶ Although The O'Donoghue was an unlikely source of radicalism and he failed to receive support from various political groupings, his initiative facilitated the most politicised response to the crisis by the start of 1880 in Kerry.

2.4 1880 general election: introduction of Parnellite politics into the county

Within the atmosphere of rising evictions and agrarian tensions, Parnellite politics rapidly emerged in the county as 1880 wore on. The catalyst for the introduction of Parnellism was the 1880 general election. The two seats for the county went uncontested. Henry Herbert, long the focus of criticism by tenant activists, retired as M.P. for the county. R.P. Blennerhassett, originally elected in the famous 1872 by-election was once again nominated along with a family relation, Sir Rowland Blennerhassett (8,390

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *TC*, 6 Jan. 1880.

⁸⁵ For an explanation of Butt's solution to the Land Question see, David Thonley, *Isaac Butt and home rule* (2nd edn., London, 1976), p. 274; Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), pp 66-7.

⁸⁶ *K.S.*, 6 Jan. 1880. The Irish National Land League was established on 21 October 1879, see R.V. Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 231.

acres, Beaufort)⁸⁷. Both had support from traditional tenant-right figures such as the Catholic clerical activist, Rev O'Connor of Ballylongford (O'Connor was a central figure in the 1872 by-election) who resurrected the defunct North Kerry Farmers Club for their nominations. Although the two Blennerhassetts were liberal-home rulers who failed to support Parnell, they were elected unopposed as the county representatives and received support from the *Kerry Sentinel* and Timothy Harrington.⁸⁸ Despite the lack of radical Parnellite politics in the county election, the contest for the borough of Tralee proved quite different. The long-standing M.P. for the town, The O'Donoghue, was opposed by the contentious land agent, Samuel Hussey. When these candidates were announced the *Kerry Sentinel*, in an editorial, stated: 'the national party have not as yet decided upon their course with regard to the borough but if only The O'Donoghue and Mr Hussey are in the field they will support The O'Donoghue for the chief part though some express their determination to abstain from voting'.⁸⁹ Placards were placed in the town calling on voters to ignore both The O'Donoghue and Hussey in favour of a pro-Parnell candidate yet to be announced.⁹⁰ However, this failed to develop leaving the election a direct contest between The O'Donoghue and Hussey. A meeting of the defunct K.T.D.A. was resurrected for the election. Although Jonathon Walpole, an opponent of home rule attended, other prominent Nationalists controlled proceedings. The Tralee Fenian, Michael Power, announced: 'if there is no other man coming forward to oppose Mr Hussey but The O'Donoghue, I will support The O'Donoghue'. The members clearly placed the association with Parnell and passed a resolution demanding that The O'Donoghue support 'the advanced section of the Irish Party'.⁹¹

The appearance of Hussey as a conservative candidate and leading land agent in the election undoubtedly galvanised and unified support around The O'Donoghue. Significantly the editor of the *Kerry Sentinel*, Timothy Harrington, became involved in O'Donoghue's election campaign. Along with Harrington, Thomas O'Rourke, secretary of the K.T.D.A, Michael Power (Fenian and pig merchant), and O'Connor Horgan, a successful solicitor and Nationalist, were principle advocates of The O'Donoghue.

⁸⁷ *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 141.

⁸⁸ *K.S.*, 16 Mar. 1880.

⁸⁹ *K.S.*, 12 Mar. 1880.

⁹⁰ *TC*, 19 Mar. 1880.

These men represented the urban middle class that were attracted to home rule during the 1870s and actively opposed The O'Donoghue in the 1874 general election for the borough. Tensions between such figures and larger tenant farmers who supported The O'Donoghue led to the demise of the K.T.D.A. in the late 1870s. Although Harrington's *Sentinel* stressed that The O'Donoghue was widely supported, when it stated 'the most perfect harmony prevails among the different sections of the popular party in Tralee at present', dissensions between the traditional liberal supporters of The O'Donoghue and the emerging Parnellite Nationalists became prevalent.⁹² When The O'Donoghue arrived in Tralee for nominations, he went to the liberal registration room, accompanied by figures such as Sir Henry Donovan, a Catholic, merchant and lower gentry figure. It was reported that the 'Nationalists remained aloof' of the nominations.⁹³ Furthermore, after the K.T.D.A. declared support to The O'Donoghue, he declined to address the organisation.⁹⁴ The leading Parnellites, Harrington and O'Connor Horgan, addressed an election meeting without The O'Donoghue's presence demonstrating a lack of unity.⁹⁵

In a sustained election campaign Hussey obtained the public support of a number of tenants who held land under him, labourers who worked for him, and the Catholic Canon of Millstreet, Griffin.⁹⁶ The election was marked by sectarian violence. At a demonstration O'Connor Horgan: 'referred to religious differences and the mob becoming excited rushed away and attacked several Protestant houses and establishments'.⁹⁷ Further rioting was reported and a force of thirty cavalry was sent to the town.⁹⁸ Despite the divisions within The O'Donoghue's camp, the sight of such a controversial land agent as Hussey in the election secured him victory by 187 votes to 133.⁹⁹ The election mobilised figures that had previously supported home rule in the town into political action. Despite that they actively promoted The O'Donoghue's candidature;

⁹¹ *TC*, 16 Mar. 1880.

⁹² *K.S.*, 23 Mar. 1880.

⁹³ *TC*, 23 Mar. 1880.

⁹⁴ *K.S.*, 30 Mar. 1880.

⁹⁵ *K.S.*, 26 Mar. 1880.

⁹⁶ *TC*, 30 Mar. 1880.

⁹⁷ Disturbances in Tralee, 31 Mar. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1880 8384).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *K.S.*, 2 Apr. 1880.

they were clearly motivated by the politics of Parnell and the election provided Parnellism with its first popular platform in Kerry.

Following quickly on the electoral success in the March general election, Parnell attempted to further extend his power over the emerging agrarian agitation with the expansion of the Land League. A land conference held by Parnell in the Rotunda was attended by 250 delegates from Land League branches and tenant defence associations from all over Ireland.¹⁰⁰ A number of delegates attended from Kerry, including Rev O'Connell from Ballybunnion, Henry Brassill, who was editor of the newly formed newspaper, *The Kerry Independent*, Timothy Harrington, and The O'Donoghue.¹⁰¹ During the conference, the course of the agrarian agitation significantly changed direction. The conference signalled the intervention of middle to large farmers into the affairs of the Land League.¹⁰² Despite opposition from western agrarian radicals, particularly Matthew Harris, who argued that the introduction of graziers into the league platform would harm the small farmer class, the conference consolidated support from larger farmers. The new policy established by the Land League centred on the dual issues of rent and evictions. The conference resolved to demand legislation to suspend evictions of all holdings valued at or below £20, called on rent to be paid at no higher a level than the poor law valuation of the holding, and stipulated that a system for the selling of land to tenants be introduced.¹⁰³ These demands transformed the social aspirations of the Land League and attracted the support of the prosperous farmers of Munster and Leinster.

2.5: Emerging agrarian tensions and 'indignant meetings'.

While the Land League was organising on a national level, agrarian tensions were rapidly worsening in Kerry. In the first six months of 1880 104 evictions were carried out by landlords in the county compared to seventy for the previous twelve months.¹⁰⁴ In definite signs of a prevailing agitation, a number of agrarian outrages were committed. In January 1880 The MacGillicuddy (15,510 acres, Whitefield, Killarney) received a

¹⁰⁰ Moody, *Davitt and the Irish revolution* (Oxford, 1981), p. 375.

¹⁰¹ *K.S.*, 30 Apr. 1880.

¹⁰² Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 101.

¹⁰³ Moody, *Davitt*, p. 374.

threatening letter warning him against evicting any tenants. In the same month a notice appeared on the walls of the Catholic church in Ballyduff threatening the lives of the landlord, T.A. Staughton (11,710 acres, Ballyhorgan) and his agent George Sandes, to intimidate them from carrying out evictions in the area.¹⁰⁵ During March, direct violent action emerged as three brothers named O'Connor took forcible possession of a farm that they were evicted from. In another incident shots were fired into the dwelling house of an individual who was about to 'grab' an evicted farm. In a different case, an unoccupied house was set alight after Lord Listowel had given the farm to another tenant after the original holder became dispossessed due to becoming insane. In the same month threatening notices were posted in Newtownsandess warning any individual who paid their rents indicating the emergence of anti-rent combinations.¹⁰⁶ Within a number of months in 1880, it became apparent that a campaign based on violent intimidation against rent payment, eviction and 'landgrabbing' had emerged at a local level.

This grassroots agitation took a public form with a number of 'indignant meetings'. The first of these was called in late April 1880 at Ballyduff to protest against the eviction of the Connor brothers from their holding on an estate owned by an absentee landlord named William Pope (821 acres).¹⁰⁷ Significantly, they held a large farm of 161 acres at an annual rent of £80 indicating that the depression was beginning to affect the larger farmers to a greater extent.¹⁰⁸ The brothers, who were amongst the strongest farmers in the region, were heavily indebted. They owed their landlord £100 and a number of civil bill decrees from other creditors had been issued against them. In an attempt to reclaim the loss, the landlord's agent offered the tenants the chance to sell their interest in the holding but they declined. The radicalisation of the situation was illustrated when on the night of their eviction the tenants broke in and took forcible possession of the holding.¹⁰⁹ The 'indignant meeting' to protest against the eviction was attended by

¹⁰⁴ *Return of cases of eviction which have come under the knowledge of the constabulary in each of the four quarters of 1877, 1878, 1879, and the first quarter of 1880 and up to the 10 June 1880*, H.C. 1880 (245), lx, 361.

¹⁰⁵ *Return of agrarian outrages reported by the R.I.C. between 1 Feb. 1880 and 31 Oct. 1880*, p. 48 H.C., 1881 (6), lxxvii, 273; *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 148; *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Pope had an address in France, see *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁸ *TC*, 13 Apr. 1880.

¹⁰⁹ *Return of agrarian outrages reported by the R.I.C. between 1 Feb. 1880 and 31 Oct. 1880*, p. 48 H.C. 1881 (6), lxxvii, 273.

'principally young men from the districts of Ballyduff and Causway'.¹¹⁰ A number of individuals who would become widely associated with the Land League, agrarian violence and rural Fenianism attended the meeting. Martin Sullivan and Thomas Dooling (Kiltomey), both farmers' sons, addressed the demonstration.¹¹¹ These individuals contrasted greatly to the large farmers that dominated the K.T.D.A. in the 1870s, and establishment figures such as Blennerhassett M.P. and the Catholic clergy, which frequently addressed tenant-right demonstrations in 1879. They were influenced by Fenianism and may have been members of the I.R.B. and provided a radicalism that was not forthcoming from the traditional tenant activists in the county. Resolutions were passed inciting boycotting and calling for no one to bid for the farm.¹¹² Timothy Harrington attended the meeting and called on the tenants of the county to combine together in clubs and associations to protect their interests.¹¹³ However, Harrington demonstrated a certain degree of conservatism and refused to support the actual case of the Connor's, stating that their level of non-landlord debt undermined their 'claims upon the sympathy of the public'.¹¹⁴

Within a number of weeks the radicalisation of agrarian relations had become increasingly prevalent when a mob resisted the eviction of a tenant named John Kelly on the Harnec estate, which was owned by Samuel Hussey.¹¹⁵ As the county sheriff, accompanied by a number of bailiffs attempted to enact the eviction, they were set upon by a large crowd and seriously beaten. A number of people were arrested for the offence including Timothy Dooling who had addressed the 'indignant meeting' at Ballyduff. He was later accused of directing the stone throwers during the riot but was acquitted.¹¹⁶ The increasing level of agrarian violence appeared directly related to some of the local figures

¹¹⁰ *K.S.*, 27 Apr. 1880.

¹¹¹ Report of R.I.C. county inspectors on the condition of Ireland, 1880: lists of persons reasonably suspected of being directly or indirectly connected with outrages during the latter quarter of 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1880 34686); The police later believed that Dooling was an I.R.B. centre in the Lixnaw region, see, File on Thomas Dooling (P.R.O., CO 904/15: microfilm, N.L.I., p. 153).

¹¹² For a full analysis of the I.R.B.'s involvement in the Land War in Kerry, see ch. VI.

¹¹³ *K.S.*, 27 Apr. 1880.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *K.S.*, 11 May 1880.

¹¹⁶ *K.S.*, 16 July 1880, *Return of agrarian outrages reported by the R.I.C. between 1 Feb. 1880 and 31 Oct. 1880*, p. 49, H.C., 1880 (6), lxxvii. 273.

that were emerging as leaders of the agitation. After the O'Connor's were again evicted from their holding, notices threatening anyone that used the land with death appeared.¹¹⁷

By May 1880 a grassroots agrarian agitation against rent payment and eviction had emerged. It had developed independently from existing local tenant leadership structures and initially failed to include influential groupings such as the Catholic clergy. Many of the individuals who came to the forefront were members of the I.R.B. However, this nascent movement was placed in a national context when Parnell addressed a meeting in Beaufort in May 1880. Located strategically between Tralee, Killarney and Killorglin, leading figures from these towns were present. A number of publicans, drapers, shopkeepers, merchants and auctioneers were also present on the platform. Furthermore, Catholic clergy attended, as did The O'Donoghue. Parnell promoted the objectives recently adopted at the April Land Convention. He also gave an aggressive, Nationalist and radical speech, which openly promoted extra-constitutional methods. He stated:

the people of Ireland are engaged at the present time in a great movement, perhaps the greatest, or one of the greatest undertakings that any nation could engage in-the task of obtaining for our people the land of our native country.... We believe that the land question will never be settled so long as the institution of landlordism survives.... If the legislature refuses to step in, this agitation will have to go on. It will increase tenfold in intensity, and the people will do for themselves that which the legislature refuses to do.¹¹⁸

Soon after Parnell's address, another 'indignant meeting' was held in the Ballyduff region. The meeting was called to protest against the taking of an evicted farm on the property of Staughton. A number of evictions had occurred on the estate and at least five evicted farms lay unoccupied in the region.¹¹⁹ Although the former tenant, Matthew O'Flaherty, had emigrated after his eviction the taking of the farm jeopardised the other evicted holdings.¹²⁰ O'Flaherty's farm was rented to another farmer in the region named John W. O'Connor. At a meeting of the K.T.D.A., which by this stage was under the control of radical agitators, Timothy Dooling and Thomas O'Rourke resolved

¹¹⁷ *Return of agrarian outrages reported by the R.I.C. between 1 Feb. 1880 and 31 Oct. 1880*, p. 49, H.C., 1880 (6), lxxvii, 273.

¹¹⁸ *K.S.*, 14 May 1880.

¹¹⁹ *K.S.*, 22 June 1880.

¹²⁰ For O'Flaherty's emigration see, *K.S.*, 6 Aug. 1880.

to hold a meeting on the grounds that O'Connor was a 'greedy land shark' with sufficient lands of his own.¹²¹ During the protest various sections of the wider 'Nationalist' community were in attendance. T.B. Silles, the large tenant farmer who Hussey controversially took protracted legal proceedings against in the 1870s, chaired the meeting. Other individuals on the platform included Rev M O'Connor, the tenant-right and home rule Catholic priest, who was involved in politics during the 1872 by-election. These traditional tenant activists were joined by the new 'radical' element. Both Thomas Dooling and Martin O'Sullivan were present on the platform. Furthermore, Timothy Harrington also attended and addressed the meeting. During this meeting the 'challenging collectivity' appeared to be in existence. Catholic clergy, large farmers and urban townsmen aligned with radical figures were unified under the one movement. Harrington outlined a number of objectives of the agitation. He promoted boycotting by stating: 'they would have to band themselves together and shun every farm from which an honest man had been evicted'.¹²² He also called on the people 'not [to] take land from which honest men were ejected for not paying an unjust rent'. Dooling believed: 'if they stood firmly together, and treated with contempt the man who took the farm from which another had been unjustly evicted, they were sure to win the cause, and they not be begging a reduction of rent from the landlords'.¹²³

During the month of July only one meeting espousing tenant concerns was held. This was in Ballybunnion to protest against a local landlord, George Hewson (1,208 acres, Ennismore), reclaiming sections of a strand, which tenants had communally used for seaweed and sand.¹²⁴ The meeting was addressed by Rev O'Connor and was acknowledged by the Land League with a letter from Parnell.¹²⁵ The first official meeting of the Land League was held in August. Although north Kerry was the centre of agrarian tensions, the meeting was held in the southern Kerry town of Killorglin. In an attempt to gain maximum exposure the meeting coincided with the ancient fair and festival, the 'Puck Fair'. The *Kerry Sentinel* claimed the location was strategically 'availed of to

¹²¹ *TC*, 8 June 1880. Timothy Dooling was emerging as a central agitator in the Ballyduff region. For occupation see *Guy's Munster Directory*, p. 107.

¹²² *K.S.*, 22 June 1880.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 143.

¹²⁵ *K.S.*, 16 July 1880.

introduce to the people of Kerry the agitation against eviction and rack rents... [the Puck Fair] brings together literally the whole of Kerry'.¹²⁶ Timothy Harrington and A.M. O'Sullivan, from the central executive of the Land League in Dublin, were the primary speakers. Harrington, aware of the innate conservatism of many of the rural classes, contended that the motto 'the land for the people of Ireland' was no 'revolutionary cry' and the league was not unlawful. O'Sullivan called on tenants not to pay rent until further land legislation, and not to take or work evicted land. He stated the Land League would support evicted tenants.¹²⁷ Indicating the lack of agrarian tensions that were already materialising in the northern region of the county, the R.I.C. believed the meeting was close to a failure. The R.I.C. officer in attendance reported: 'this meeting was a noisy one owing to people having drink taken. They cheered and shouted for almost everything. There were a great number of people in town who took no part in the meeting. This meeting was almost a failure'.¹²⁸ No branch of the league was established as a consequence of the meeting.

Despite the lack of political organisation the number of agrarian outrages continued to increase. The four-month period between May and August witnessed thirty-seven agrarian outrages, compared to seventeen for the previous four months.¹²⁹ Much of this violence centred on evicted farms. In the nine-month period between January and the end of September 1880 landlords carried out 183 evictions in the county. Of this number 114 tenants were reinstated largely as caretakers, leaving sixty-nine full evicted farms.¹³⁰ Landlords' attempts to use this evicted land led to much outrage. In late June a body of thirty men armed with guns and scythes attacked the occupiers of a farm, which had been the scene of a recent eviction at Moybella near Listowel. The 'grabbers' were forced off the holding and the evicted tenant was reinstated by the gang.¹³¹ After a number of arrests for the offence, the prisoners were brought into Listowel town where they were cheered

¹²⁶ K.S., 13 Aug. 1880.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Report of Land League meeting, Killorglin 11 Aug. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP, Queen versus Parnell, Carton 5).

¹²⁹ *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the R.I.C. 1880*, H.C., 1881 (12), lxxvii, 619.

¹³⁰ *Return of cases of eviction under which knowledge of constabulary in Ireland, 1880*, H.C., 1881 (2), lxxvii, 713.

¹³¹ K.S., 29 June 1880.

by a large crowd.¹³² Another evicted farm at Ahabeg in Lixnaw located between Tralee and Listowel was the source of a number of outrages. In July, two cattle belonging to a bailiff of Samuel Hussey's were killed on it while in August hay on the holding was destroyed.¹³³ By late summer the general north Kerry region was the centre of violence. Meadowing from the evicted farm at Moybella was boycotted at a fair at Clounlogher (on the hinterland of Tralee) where a large attendance of farmers was present.¹³⁴ Forms of agitation also appeared in existence outside north Kerry. As early as June 1880, a magistrate sitting at the Aunnascaul Petty Sessions on the western side of Tralee warned against ringleaders who were inciting people to pay no rent in the area.¹³⁵ By the start of autumn agrarian unrest had already reached a level unknown during the pervious decade.

Between 1879 and the autumn of 1880 political and agrarian activity irrevocably altered in the county. Throughout 1879 the depression in the agricultural economy put the smaller farmers and agricultural labourers in distress with reports of destitution prevalent amongst this class. Despite this, agrarian relations failed to radicalise and the response to the distress remained moderate. In contrast to the anti-landlord agitation that was emerging concurrently in the 'west', the response largely constituted the opening of public relief works, some landlord reductions in rent and the dispersal of private charity. This effectively relieved much of the extreme distress the smaller holders were under. Politically, traditional tenant activists such as the Catholic clergy and Blennerhassett, a Buttite M.P., remained the primary advocates of farmers' concerns. However, these figures, along with the defunct K.T.D.A. proved, incapable of fully articulating the needs of tenants and in particular to force landlords to act correspondingly. The anxiety of the tenantry was prevalent when The O'Donoghue held a demonstration in January 1880 that was partially successful despite the fact that he failed to achieve support from the clergy or more advanced home rulers. The O'Donoghue, who had long been cultivating himself

¹³² Notes on the *Kerry Sentinel*, Jan.–Sept. 1880, (N.L.I., Harrington papers, MS 8933). This source is a ledger of notes taken by Timothy Harrington from the *Sentinel* concerning the emerging land agitation from Jan-Sept 1880. Although undated these notes were compiled some time after the events. On a number of occasions Harrington refers to the existence of violent outrages before the emergence of the league. This would indicate he was gathering evidence to defend the organisation against claims that it was a violent conspiracy, most probably at the Special Commission.

¹³³ *K.S.*, 30 July; 20 Aug. 1880.

¹³⁴ *K.S.*, 30 July 1880.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

as a tenant activist, merged with the advanced home rulers in the 1880 general election for the Tralee Borough. The presence of Samuel Hussey as a candidate ensured that old animosities between The O'Donoghue and home rulers in the town were removed. Significantly, the election provided a platform for Parnellite supporters; the most significant of whom was Timothy Harrington, editor of the *Kerry Sentinel*. The Parnellites took a leading role in the election campaign and called on The O'Donoghue to support Parnell. As the Land League convention in April 1880 introduced the larger farmers of Leinster and Munster into the movement, agrarian tensions were developing into a localised and grassroots agitation in regions in northern Kerry. A campaign of resistance to eviction coupled with intimidation and violence against landlords and 'grabbers' emerged. Figures consisting of farmers' sons who were influenced by Fenianism and were independent of the traditional Catholic middle class power structure of agrarian society appeared to spearhead this violent agitation. Importantly, the arrival of Parnell to the county in May facilitated the gelling of these figures with the Catholic middle class. At a demonstration in Beaufort where Parnell spoke of the necessity of the destruction of landlordism, Catholic clergy, urban merchants, large tenant farmers, and the new 'radical' figures all featured. Although the Land League had yet to emerge the 'challenging collectivity' was apparently in place.

Chapter III: Land League agitation: 1881-82.

3.1: Emergence of the Land League, Sept.-Dec. 1880.

By September the agrarian agitation that was simmering at a local level over the previous number of months in the county quickly escalated. Within the first two weeks of September tenants on the property of Wilson Gunn in Causeway (11,819 acres) and Major James Crosbie in Ballyheigue (13,422 acres) received threatening letters warning them not to pay rents.¹ Another land owner in the Causeway region, Charles W. Staughton (2495 acres), became the first landlord in the county to be physically attacked when he had shots fired into his house during the same week.² Although Staughton hadn't enacted any evictions, he refused to reduce the September rent leading to a strike on his property. A number of days before the attack he received a threatening notice demanding a twenty-five percent abatement in rent.³ Within two weeks the tenants of another landlord in the same region, T.A. Staughton (11,710 acres), refused to pay rent above the government valuation (Griffiths).⁴ During the same week tenants on the Mahony estate in Knockanure received a notice threatening death if they paid more than the government valuation as rent.⁵ Despite the fact that the Land League had not established a branch in the county by September 1880, the doctrine of the movement, concerning paying rent at the government valuation was becoming a cornerstone for localised agitation. Importantly, intimidation and violence was used to enforce rent strikes indicating a significant 'radical influence' in the developing movement.

In September, the land agent Samuel Hussey began adopting stringent measures to fight the nascent agitation. A common practice in the region was for evicted tenants to retake possession of their holdings after they were evicted. This practice was particularly evident in the county, and out of a total of eighty-four such incidents reported in the whole country during 1880, twenty-four occurred in Kerry.⁶ In an attempt to counter this

¹ *K.S.*, 14 Sept. 1880; *Land owners in Ireland, 1876* (Baltimore, 1988), pp 141-42.

² *Outrage Returns 1880* (N.A.I., CSO ICR); *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 145.

³ *K.S.*, 14 Sept. 1880 and *Return of agrarian outrages reported by Royal Irish Constabulary, Feb.- Oct. 1880*, p. 52, H.C., 1881 (6), lxxvii, 273. Although Staughton and his daughter were in the house at the time of the attack neither were injured.

⁴ *K.S.*, 1 Oct. 1880 and *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 145.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the constabulary office, 1880*, p. 3, H.C., 1881 (12), lxxvii, 619.

practice, Hussey destroyed two houses while carrying out evictions. The first of these was the dwelling of a tenant named Shea on the estate of Arthur Blennerhassett (12,621 acres) in Ballyseedy on the outskirts of Tralee on which Hussey was agent.⁷ Within a number of days Hussey burnt down the dwelling of an evicted tenant named Kennedy on the Hickson property (13,443 acres) in the Dingle region.⁸ These aggressive measures provided the Land League with the opportune moment to organise in the county. Soon after the burning in Dingle, a meeting was held in O'Sullivan's Hotel in Tralee that led to the establishment of the first branch of the Land League in the county. It adopted Timothy Harrington as president, Thomas O'Rourke (publican and former secretary of the K.T.D.A.) as secretary, and M.L. Lyons (shopkeeper) as treasurer. Although all were townsmen, a number of tenant farmers were also present. Jeremiah Leahy and Michael McMahon P.L.G., both large farmers, were elected as committee members.⁹ During the first meeting of the Tralee League Harrington outlined the objectives of the league. He concentrated largely on the rent increases by landlords and in particular, highlighted Talbot-Crosbie's Ardfert estate. He also condemned 'land grabbing' and spoke of the recent burning of evicted tenants' houses in the county by stating:

the landlords are, it appears, determined to go as far in pushing what they are pleased to call their rights, but what others call their tyranny, as to burn down the houses of the unfortunate tenants that are evicted.¹⁰

The immediate objectives of the movement were clearly defined as the lowering of rent, preventing land grabbing and protecting evicted tenants.

With the introduction of the Land League into the county the agitation was transformed. During the previous nine months (Jan.-Sept.) six agrarian demonstrations were held in Kerry. After the establishment of the Land League five land meetings were held in October alone; many of which were addressed by leading league organisers of a national prominence.¹¹ Arthur O'Connor M.P. spoke outside Dingle at Ballingravn on

⁷ *K.S.*, 24 Sept. 1880; *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 141.

⁸ *K.S.*, 28 Sept. 1880; *Land owners in Ireland*, p. 143.

⁹ *K.S.*, 28 Sept. 1880; Leahy was a tenant to Lord Kenmare and paid an annual rent of £104, see, *K.S.*, 11 June 1880.

¹⁰ *K.S.*, 5 Oct. 1880.

¹¹ *Return showing for each month of the years 1879 and 1880 the number of Land League meetings held and agrarian crimes reported to the Inspector General of the R.I.C. in each county throughout Ireland*, p.5, H.C., 1881 (5), lxxvii, 793

the site where Hussey burnt down the house of the evicted tenant, Kennedy. He told tenants to 'keep a grip of your homesteads' and called on them to leave 'the evicted tenants remain in the neighbourhood so they can take the land when possible'.¹² In Castleisland, O'Connor again addressed a meeting, but this time he was accompanied by Joseph Biggar M.P.¹³ Other public league meetings were held in Ballyduff, Kingwilliamstown and Brosna.¹⁴ During November and December another eleven land meetings were held in the county.¹⁵

These public meetings provided the impetus for the creation of branches of the Land League at a local level. By the end of December 1880 at least fourteen local branches of the league had been established and forty-one branch meetings were reported in the league's mouthpiece, the *Kerry Sentinel*. This unprecedented mobilisation of tenant farmers was concentrated in the northern half of the county. Of the forty-one branch meetings of the league held, all but two occurred in the northern three unions.

Table 3.a: The number of branch meetings of the Land League held in each poor law union, Sept.-Dec. 1880.

Tralee	Listowel	Killarney	Caherciveen	Dingle	Kenmare
26	8	5	2	0	0

Source: *KS*, 28 Sept.-31 Dec. 1880.¹⁶

Land League organisers attempted to introduce the Land League in the poorer southern and western regions. Land meetings were held in Dingle and Caherciveen. However, by the end of 1880 Caherciveen was the only region where a branch of the Land League was established. In the Killarney Poor Law Union only three branches were set up. The first was in Firies, a region located in the rich central plains of the county which was connected to Tralee. The Milltown and Listry branch also incorporated land on this rich plain. The third branch was in Killarney town where the advanced Catholic middle class

¹² *K.S.*, 8 Oct. 1880.

¹³ *K.S.*, 12 Oct. 1880.

¹⁴ *K.S.*, 15 Oct. 1880, 19 Oct. 1880, 26 Oct. 1880.

¹⁵ *Return showing for each month of the years 1879 and 1880 the number of Land League meetings held and agrarian crimes reported to the Inspector General of the R.I.C. in each county throughout Ireland*, p. 5, H.C., 1881 (5) lxxvii, 793.

¹⁶ The following is a list of the locations of branches and the number of meetings held; Tralee 12, Ballyduff 3, Castleisland 5, Brosna 4, Milltown and Listry 2, Firies 2, Caherciveen 2, Lixnaw 1, Listowel 2, Knocknagoshel 1, Ardfer 2, O'Dorney 2, Newtownsandes 1, Killarney 3.

of lower professionals and merchants were the prominent organisers. The rural areas that lay south of Killarney failed to become immersed in the Land League. In these regions the vast majority of tenants had lowly valued holdings. The concession of rent at Griffith's valuation would have made little material difference to such tenants. The region failed to radicalise during the extensive distress of 1879 when the economic conditions of the small tenant holder necessitated action. The large farmer policies of the Land League failed to appeal to tenants in this region. Also poor infrastructure and levels of education further hampered the movement in south and west Kerry. The concentration of the movement in the more prosperous northern part of the county augments the theory that the dramatic improvements in Irish life experienced between 1850 and 1876, particularly in diet, housing and education meant that 'the land war was a product not merely of agricultural crisis, but also of a revolution of rising expectations'.¹⁷ The middling and large farmers that were prominent in the northern half of the county had experienced a cumulative benefit from the years of prosperity, and 'for them their relative elevation in the world was hard won and had to be defended at all costs'.¹⁸

While the Land League clearly mobilised the middle class tenantry, the movement utilised the supposed 'unwritten law' of agrarian society in its rhetoric. The 'unwritten law' was a complicated and ill-defined agrarian code of practices, which emanated from the customary rights of peasants in the 'moral economy' of the pre-Famine period. These practices were 'based on mutual obligation and shared responsibility' between rich and poor.¹⁹ Despite the emergence of agrarian capitalism in the nineteenth century, contemporary commentators still recognised the 'unwritten law'. A leading British civil servant named George Campbell believed that one of the major threats to British rule in Ireland was the existence of an alternative law and the failure of the official law to always correspond to the realities of Irish life.²⁰ He was of the opinion that 'in Ireland there are two sets of laws-the English laws, and the laws or customs of the country, which,

¹⁷ Donnelly, *Cork*, p. 250.

¹⁸ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 80.

¹⁹ Thomas Bartlett, 'An end to moral economy' in C.H.E. Philpin, *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 195. The work of E.P. Thompson is the standard bearer on the 'moral economy', see E.P. Thompson, 'The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century', *Past & Present*, no. 50 (Feb. 1971), pp 76-136.

²⁰ For a brief outline of Campbell's career see, G. Le. G. Norgate, revised by Davis Steele, 'Sir George Campbell' in <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4499>.

enforced in a different way, are as active and effective'.²¹ By the emergence of the Land War period the 'unwritten law' was based on a set of principles that gave tenants claims over land regardless of ownership or the ability to pay rents.²²

In promoting the league, national and local activists frequently evoked the 'natural' rights tenants had under the 'unwritten law'. In Dingle, Arthur O'Connor instructed the people to 'feed your children rather than pay rent and don't pay any rent if you cannot do it without inconvenience to your children, or to those who gave you credit for food when you went without it'.²³ During a meeting in Ballyduff, it was resolved that enforced rent payment was 'contrary to law, human and divine, and we emphatically condemn evictions for the non-payment of such rents'.²⁴ In particular, the destroying of evicted tenants' homes was an affront to this law. The *Kerry Sentinel* clearly played on the sentiments that the burning of a tenant's house could evoke. After the burning in Dingle, the newspaper reported that '[this] new and revolting phase in the land war has naturally caused a feeling of horror'.²⁵ When Hussey repeated the act on the Kenmare estate the newspaper believed that 'the burning of Rath is not likely to die out of the memory of the people of Kerry for a long time to come'.²⁶ It went on to state that the act was a 'needless outrage upon the feelings of the people'.²⁷ This incident in particular demonstrated the presumed breach by landlordism of the customary rights of the tenantry. Lord Kenmare was a Catholic and widely popular landlord who was considered as having a 'parental' relationship with his tenantry. His popularity was demonstrated as late as November 1880 when over 5,000 of his tenants led by the local Catholic clergy and largest farmers on his estate, met to protest against a threatening letter that he had received.²⁸ However, the burning of a tenant's house on the lands was something the *Kerry Sentinel* 'deeply regretted' and were at pains 'to see the Earl of Kenmare playing

²¹ Quoted in Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism*, p. 50, see also George Campbell, *Irish Land* (London, 1869); for an explanation of this work in relation to the 'unwritten law' see, Heather Laird, *Subversive law in Ireland, 1879-1920: from 'unwritten law' to the Dáil courts* (Dublin, 2005), p. 21.

²² Donald Jordan, 'The Irish National League and the "unwritten law": rural protest and nation building in Ireland 1882-90' in *Past & Present*, no. 158 (Feb 1998), p. 148.

²³ *K.S.*, 8 Oct. 1880.

²⁴ *K.S.*, 15 Oct. 1880.

²⁵ *K.S.*, 28 Sept. 1880.

²⁶ *K.S.*, 1 Oct. 1880.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *K.S.*, 16 Nov. 1880.

the second fiddle for him[Samuel Hussey] while the houses of the property are in ablaze'.²⁹ In turn, league activists claimed that the official law of the government failed to protect tenants. At a league meeting in Brosna it was resolved that they would 'submit no longer to the unjust law, which had reduced their country to a state of poverty and humiliation'.³⁰ Similar language and resolutions were common at league meetings. In promoting the movement, Land Leaguers promoted the principles of the 'unwritten law'. Enforced rent payment, evictions, landgrabbing and the destroying of tenants' homes by landlords were all seen as offences to traditional customary rights. Promoters of the Land League drew on this to some extent when articulating criticisms of landlordism.

3.2: The unravelling of the ideology of the Land League

The reality of landlord-tenant relations and the agrarian economy was more complicated than the image portrayed by the Land League. Historical research has 'debunked' the Nationalist and Land League myth of a rack renting landlord class in the post-Famine period. However, other factors relating to the agrarian economy are of salient importance in understanding the emergence of the Land League. The level of actual eviction remained relatively low. For example, among the 2,100 occupiers on the Kenmare estate in the county, the permanent-eviction rate was reportedly one in 400 in 1878, one in 500 in 1879 and one in 700 in 1880.³¹ Despite Samuel Hussey's apparently belligerent behaviour in burning down a number of evicted tenants' houses, he didn't resort to wholesale evictions. During the first six months of 1880, out of the 4,160 tenants under his agency in the county, he had evicted thirteen. Of this number, two were given passage to America by Hussey, while eight were readmitted as caretakers.³² The practice of readmitting evicted tenants was common. In the eighteen month period between 1 January 1879 and 31 June 1880, 152 evictions were carried out in the county. Of this number slightly more than half, seventy-eight, were readmitted as caretakers.³³ During the last six months of 1880, a period which corresponded with the growth of the Land

²⁹ *K.S.*, 1 Oct. 1880.

³⁰ *K.S.*, 26 Oct. 1880.

³¹ J.S. Donnelly, 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century' in *J.K.H.A.S.*, no. 22 (1989), p. 68.

³² *K.S.*, 5 Oct. 1880.

³³ *Return of the number of families evicted in Ireland for non-payment of rent, and re-admitted as caretakers, 1877- June 1880*, pp 2-5, H.C., 1880 (317), lx, 367.

League and the agrarian agitation, all but twelve out of seventy-two tenants that were evicted were readmitted as caretakers.³⁴ More commonly landlords initiated legal proceedings against tenants without resorting to any form of eviction. In 1879 249 ejectment notices were issued against tenants in the county while 1880 witnessed 279.³⁵ Although this activity heightened agrarian tensions, it would appear that the majority of the 18,747 agricultural holdings in the county were not directly affected by landlord legal action.³⁶

Other aspects of the Land League ideology failed to represent the realities of the agrarian economy. This was particularly the case concerning the 'unwritten law'. The protection of traditional customary rights motivated a number of violent agrarian movements in the pre-Famine period such as the Thrashers and Whiteboys.³⁷ However, many of these emanated from the lower classes of the agrarian order. In the post-Famine period tenant farmers, particularly middle to large sized ones were fully incorporated into the emerging agrarian capitalist economy. Tenant farmers became indoctrinated in agrarian capitalism as they took advantage of the increase in agricultural prices. They entered a consumer society and utilised the security of their holdings to obtain credit from various sources. Significantly, larger tenants and urban traders such as shopkeepers frequently bought the interest in holdings and speculated on extra land. Furthermore, much of this economic activity was regulated by the official law demonstrated in the large number of claims in the civil bill courts, most of which were initiated by various sections of the non-landlord agrarian community.³⁸ The principles of the Land League and the 'unwritten law' seemed to be far removed from this economic activity. However, many of those who promoted the Land League were also the participators of such agrarian capitalism. As R.V. Comerford has succinctly noted:

³⁴ *Return of cases of eviction under the knowledge of the constabulary in Ireland, 1880*, pp 4-5, H.C., 1881 (2), lxxvii, 713.

³⁵ *Return of number of civil bill ejectments entered, tried and determined in Ireland, 1877-80*, pp 2-6, H.C. 1881 (90), lxxvii, 685.

³⁶ *Agricultural Statistics of Ireland, 1880*, pp 55-56 [C 2932], H.C. 1881, xciii, 685.

³⁷ A range of historical research has been undertaken on these movements, for example see; Michael Beames, *Peasants and power: the Whiteboy movements and their control in pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex, 1983); for contemporary pre-Famine observations on such agrarianism see, George Cornwall Lewis, *Local disturbances in Ireland* (London, 1836).

³⁸ For a full description of the agrarian economy in the 1870s see ch. I.

Looking at the enthusiastic league activity of some individual strong farmers and shopkeepers-farmers it is difficult not to be reminded of *converses* making demonstrations of zeal at an *auto-da-fe*. How many of those who joined most vehemently in the attack on land grabbers were themselves in possession of land that had been scooped up in comparatively recent times?³⁹

One of the biggest challenges of the local league leaders was to implement the movement's unilateral principals on the agrarian economy, without disunion and self-interest coming to the fore.

The contradiction between aspects of Land League policy and certain realities of the agrarian economy were highlighted by a Catholic clerical figure who openly opposed the movement, named Canon Griffin from the parish of Millstreet (although in county Cork, Millstreet was in the Roman Catholic diocese of Kerry). In a letter published in the county's newspapers he commented:

Why, if the people are indoctrinated with these dangerous dogmas 'no rent for landlords' 'the land for the people', the farmer this day will find very soon that his labourers and servants will say 'you must no longer keep this large farm... I have as good a right to this land as you'.⁴⁰

While Griffin highlighted the potential for radical action against tenant farmers by agricultural labourers, he also concentrated on the payment of non-landlord debts. He wrote:

"pay no rent" surely the same sentiment applies to all other contracts-the farmer who acts on this nefarious advice may say-"I won't pay, or try to pay, my other debts. I won't pay the bank or the butter merchant, or the merchant from whom I got food and clothes".⁴¹

Land League ideology specifically attempted to distinguish between agricultural rents and all other debts. In 1879 Davitt and Parnell publicly urged that debts to shopkeepers had a higher priority than rents.⁴² On numerous occasions the issue was dealt with by the organising committee of the Land League. During one meeting at which Parnell nominated the secretary of the National Bank as a member of the league, the issue of non-landlord debt was addressed. John Ferguson stated that

³⁹ Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 237.

⁴⁰ *K.S.*, 14 Sept. 1880.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics, and society in Ireland, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1984), p. 472

the shopkeeper must unquestionably be paid and there must be no attempt whatever to meddle with his right to be paid, or his right to exhort payment.... They must not sanction the idea that because it was the right to resist an unjust and grasping landlord they had a right to resist the – he would not say unjust because he had a right to his own by every law, human and divine-but the grasping shopkeeper.⁴³

Undoubtedly this measure attempted to assure not just the tenants who were rural capitalists, but also merchants, bankers and shopkeepers of the principles of the league.⁴⁴ Despite this, the issue of non-landlord debt was a reality in the continual distress of tenants. Throughout 1878 and 1879 shopkeepers and bankers called in many of their loans and refused virtually all applications for additional credit.⁴⁵ The credit squeeze by these creditors was seen as a significant factor in the distress of the tenantry.⁴⁶

Another factor in agrarian issues was the competition between tenants for land during the 1870s. As Canon Griffin contended, farmers offered 'immense fines and rents for lands, and even outbid each other for every farm that is put up for sale or let'.⁴⁷ Such activity inherently went against the 'unwritten law'. While the league attempted to concentrate on landlord-tenant relations, the reality of the agrarian economy meant a panoply of complicated and potentially divisive intra-tenant commercial relationships existed.

As early as the second branch meeting of the Tralee League, tensions surrounding such issues, that had little to do with landlord-tenant relations, began to emerge. A tenant named Rooney attempted to bring a case before the league against a Tralee merchant for taking his farm. The trader, Patrick Divane, was a grocer from Castle Street that was representative of the shopkeeper-farmer class who obtained land through their position as creditors and as a result of their increased wealth. For example, he held another farm of twenty-eight acres after the tenant, a Mrs Barton, financially collapsed. Barton owed him £35 and Divane took the farm in lieu of the debt.⁴⁸ Rooney's case highlighted the increased tensions between traders and farmers and between creditors and debtors.

⁴³ *F.J.*, 20 Oct. 1880.

⁴⁴ Comerford, *Fenians*, p. 234.

⁴⁵ Donnelly, 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century' (1989), p. 67.

⁴⁶ See ch. II.

⁴⁷ *K.S.*, 8 Oct. 1880.

⁴⁸ *K.S.*, 24 Dec. 1880.

Although not evicted by his landlord, Rooney was heavily indebted to various other sources. With a number of decrees against him for repayment of these debts, Rooney was forced to offer a bill of sale on the interest of the farm. Rooney's interest was the only security that his creditors had to recuperate their loans. In a public sale, the farm went to Divane for £100. However, it later transpired that Rooney had organised that the sale should go to a Mr Yielding and that no other person would bid for the farm. In turn, no other bids were offered at the sale and the price of £100, which Divane acquired the farm at, was considered well under the real value of the interest that was rumoured at around £500 or £600. In turn, a campaign was orchestrated to force Divane to give up the farm. Under the auspices of the local parish priest, Fr O'Leary, collections were made for Rooney and a number of public letters were published in the county's newspapers chastising Divane as a 'land grabber'.⁴⁹ In consequence, Divane's trade was harmed and the Ballymacelligot Relief Committee stopped getting Indian meal from him.⁵⁰ In turn, Divane claimed that he knew nothing of the popular feeling not to bid for the farm and offered to give it back anytime on condition that he was repaid the £100.

During the meeting of the Tralee Land League, Thomas O'Rourke attempted to discuss the issue. However, Harrington acting as president prevented its introduction. He argued that it was a case of farmer against trader and stated:

The legitimate business of the league was to interfere in all cases of excessive rent, but there was no case here of excessive rent; and on the other hand the rent seemed low and they were quarrelling with one another for the farm.... In a matter of this kind we may lay ourselves open to grave suspicion by interfering with a trader with whom some of our members may be in competition.⁵¹

At the next meeting another attempt was made to introduce the case to the league. This time, Michael Power (pig merchant), giving testament to Harrington's fears, proposed that nothing be bought from Divane's store. Harrington again refused to entertain the matter and warned of potential discord. He stated: 'I know if we interfere between farmer and trader we shall yet come to a serious division upon some such case'.⁵² It was rumoured in an unsigned letter to the press, that Rooney attempted to keep the price as

⁴⁹ See *T.C.*, 7 May 1880, 20 Aug. 1880, 3 Sept. 1880, and 10 Sept. 1880.

⁵⁰ *T.C.*, 20 Aug. 1880.

⁵¹ *K.S.*, 12 Oct. 1880.

⁵² *K.S.*, 26 Oct. 1880.

low as possible in what was known as a 'sham sale' in order to defraud his creditors. Rooney's case portrayed the financial situation of many tenants. Their personal debt was large with money owed to merchants and shopkeepers. The interest in their holdings acted as security for many of these loans. The situation was summarised by an anonymous observer who wrote in the *Kerry Sentinel*:

many farms are at present mortgaged for large sums, and that the creditors have no security for their loans except the right to turn the mortgages into money... these farms may be put up for auction any day.⁵³

Despite the efforts of Timothy Harrington, the agitation began incorporating resistance to such non-landlord debts. During early November 1880 in the Killarney region, the interest in two farms went up for sale under a sheriff's writ at the instance of Alexander McCarthy, a Cork butter merchant. The farms, which would have had fetched up to £300 two years previously, had no bids on them indicating a level of boycotting.⁵⁴ The issue of tenants preventing the sale of their holdings to undermine their creditors was not lost on commentators in the county. The *Tralee Chronicle* observed: 'if the impression generally obtained that farmers could mortgage their farms and spoil the sale afterwards... where is the merchant, trader, or banker that would lend him the money?'.⁵⁵

As branches of the Land League emerged in other areas, issues concerning land sold to reclaim non-landlord debts became prominent. In Castleisland, a case concerning the farm of a bankrupt farmer who absconded came to the attention of the league. When the interest of the farm was sold to pay his debts, another tenant named Brosnan from Close bought the holding. The absconded tenant's wife, a Mrs O'Sullivan, who still held the land, was served with an ejectment notice by Brosnan. During a meeting of the Castleisland branch the president, P.D. Kenny, declared it a case of 'landgrabbing'. In turn, a scathing unsigned letter appeared in the press. The writer, clearly representative of the merchant and trader class, expounded their fears when he stated:

The general opinion among bankers, merchants and farmers themselves, that if we had freesale in land the country would be prosperous, and the farmers worthy of credit and confidence. But now according to the gospel of the Castleisland Land League, it is not safe to give any farmer credit as he refuses to pay a decree or

⁵³ *K.S.*, 21 Sept. 1880.

⁵⁴ *K.E.P.*, 6 Nov. 1880.

⁵⁵ *T.C.*, 21 Sept. 1880.

execution. If they are desirous to benefit the farmers they would give all the legitimate assistance to the bankers, and merchants and traders in recovering their lawful debts. If they cannot do this no well regulated society can exist.⁵⁶

Clearly the doctrine of the Land League was too simplistic for the complexities of the agrarian economy. The heavy debts acquired by farmers from urban sources were central to the financial difficulties farmers were in. When tenants lost their farms due to recovery of these non-landlord debts they were turning to the Land League for protection. However, the protection of such tenants and their farms threatened the interests of the middle class townsmen who made up much of the league leadership. The issue demonstrated the contradictions of the policies promulgated by the Land League.

3.3: Land League Courts.

The power of the league at a local level quickly materialised. At only the second meeting of the Tralee branch it was declared that J. W. O'Connor, the farmer who took the farm Flaherty was evicted from four months previously, had given up the holding.⁵⁷ The Castleisland branch also demonstrated its ability to enforce its regulations on agrarian matters. Two tenants named Browne and Keane were accused of taking evicted land during a meeting of the branch. Despite protestations from a local Catholic curate, Fr Murphy, that the issue was a family matter and should have nothing to do with the branch, it was decided that 'if his [Browne's] hands are clean let him come before the league'.⁵⁸ After the two accused men failed to appear before the next meeting to explain their actions they were subsequently boycotted. Within a month, Browne submitted and accompanied by two armed policemen attended a league meeting and gave up the holding.⁵⁹ The Land League objective of preventing the re-taking of evicted land appeared to have succeeded. By the end of October 1880 the R.I.C. county inspector was of the belief that 'land from which tenants may be evicted [from] will not be taken by

⁵⁶ *K.S.*, 30 Nov. 1880

⁵⁷ *K.S.*, 5 Oct. 1880.

⁵⁸ *K.S.*, 19 Nov. 1880.

⁵⁹ *K.S.*, 21 Dec. 1880.

other tenants, but allowed to remain uncultivated, during the present excited state of the people'.⁶⁰

As the power of local branches grew, the proceedings of branch meetings came to resemble 'land courts'. Aggrieved individuals brought cases before meetings. Complaints dealt with not just landlord activities but also competing claims by tenants over land. In dealing with such disputes local branches of the league achieved a large degree of power and control. These cases also provided the opportunity to put the ideology of the league into practice. However, such disputes were regularly complicated and protracted affairs and often highlighted the failures of the 'law of the league'. In Tralee, a case came before the league in December 1880, which demonstrated the complexity of many agrarian disputes and some of the dynamics behind the activities of the league courts. A man named Edward Ferris complained to the league that two men named Leane and McElligott took a farm from which he was evicted from. Ferris claimed that when he was faced with eviction his father-in-law had offered to pay the arrears but the landlord refused. Thomas Leane and William McElligott were given the holding on the payment of a fine with a thirty one year lease.⁶¹ The Tralee League called the new tenants to appear before the branch. Both Leane and McElligott claimed they got full consent from Ferris to take the land, a claim which he denied. Both parties got sworn affidavits from Tralee based solicitors as evidence in their cases. During the hearing, Harrington asked Leane and McElligott would they give up the farm if they received remuneration for the outlay they spent on the farm. They refused, asking why Ferris didn't come to them before they started outlaying money on the farm and stated 'we did not know this law [of the league] was in place when we took it'.⁶² Two central figures in the case were Ferris' father-in-law, William Talbot, and brother-in-law, John Talbot. Talbot senior was a well established figure within the region. He was a rate collector, which illustrated his connections within local government. He originally held the farm but gave it to Ferris after he married his daughter. He had a number of other agricultural holdings, all of which he claimed his children were on.⁶³ His son, John Talbot, was a butter merchant and

⁶⁰ Reports of county inspectors of the R.I.C., 28 Oct. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1880 34686).

⁶¹ *K.S.*, 7 Dec. 1880.

⁶² *K.S.*, 14 Dec. 1880.

⁶³ *K.S.*, 14 Dec. 1880; *K.S.*, 24 Dec. 1880.

had a shop in the town. John Talbot had also become a leading figure in the league in Tralee, sitting on the committee.⁶⁴ Despite Harrington's attempts to deal with the case with caution it became clear that Ferris, with the help of his in-law's influence, was going to win. Both Leane and McElligott left the meeting before a judgement was reached.⁶⁵ The case illustrated extensive problems within the league. Personal disputes concerning competing tenants' claims over land came to the forefront of branch meetings. These issues were not directly related to landlord-tenant relations and were potentially divisive. Furthermore, it appeared that leading members of local branches were using the power of the league to further personal and family gain.

Similar cases involving complicated struggles over land became prominent at meetings. During another meeting a woman named Catherine McMahan applied to the league concerning a farm she was evicted from in 1868. After her eviction the following tenant became 'broken down' and the holding was subsequently let to various other tenants for grazing purposes. Invoking the 'unwritten law' she claimed that two of these tenants, Patrick and Michael McMahan (two brothers who were also her nephews) were already wealthy, had a number of other holdings and could afford to give up the farm which she wanted for her children.⁶⁶ Indeed, both men were well established. Patrick McMahan not only grazed farms but was also a butter merchant, while Michael McMahan was a Poor Law Guardian, and a founding member of the league in the town.⁶⁷ Although the McMahans were slow to respond, William Hillard, Denny Street, gave up part of the lands that he grazed. Patrick Divane, who was previously targeted for buying the interest in Rooney's farm but had by this stage emerged as prominent member of the league, said he would give up the twenty-eight acres of the holding which he held.⁶⁸ Tenants also turned to the Land League to gain retribution from a past loss of land. At Killarney David Hegarty of Glenflesk brought his brother before the local league. Previously Hegarty handed the farm over to his sibling because he couldn't pay the rent but was now seeking it back. When the league asked his brother would he return it to

⁶⁴ *K.S.*, 7 Jan. 1880.

⁶⁵ *K.S.*, 24 Dec. 1880.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *K.S.*, 28 Sept. 1880.

⁶⁸ *K.S.*, 24 Dec. 1880.

him, he refused. He claimed he lost money on it and retorted: 'where was the Land League when I came and paid the rent for it two years ago?'.⁶⁹

Issues such as these came to dominate proceedings of meetings. Individuals brought forward claims over land that they had lost to other tenants and had little to do with landlord-tenant relations. These were often complicated intra-tenant affairs with much personal and family rivalry involved. Furthermore, many of the disputes were born out of the economic activity of tenants and traders who engaged in post-Famine agrarian capitalism and acquired the interest in extra land. Timothy Harrington attempted to prevent local branches of the league becoming embroiled in such affairs. Speaking at a meeting to establish a branch in Ardfer he

counselled the members... to be very careful in the selection of the cases presented to them for consideration at the meetings of the league. He looked upon it as a very serious danger in other branches of the league, that cases which it was absurd to entertain, and in which it would be impossible to do any good, were being brought forward constantly'.⁷⁰

During a branch meeting of the Tralee League, Harrington warned of the large number of cases before the branch and complained that someone had recently asked him to take one on that was fifteen years old.⁷¹ By January 1880 Harrington bitterly complained that the activities of the branch 'were such as to seriously injure the character of this league, if not its very existence'. He also warned that he would dissolve the branch if they continued to deal with cases that were out of the remit of the league.⁷²

The cases that came before the branch meetings of the Land League in the latter half of 1880 demonstrated a number of salient points relating to agrarian tensions during the period. The set of grievances that the Land League mobilized around concentrated wholly on landlord-tenant relations, failing to acknowledge other underlying relationships and tensions. Significantly, when the law of the league came into practice at a branch level many of the disputes that formulated agrarian conflict had little to do with landlords. Much of the disputes were based on intra-tenant and family conflict. This gives validity to David Fitzpatrick's assessment of agrarian disorder which highlights such

⁶⁹ *K.S.*, 21 Dec. 1880.

⁷⁰ *K.S.*, 21 Dec. 1880.

⁷¹ *K.S.*, 24 Dec. 1880.

⁷² *K.S.*, 7 Jan. 1881.

tensions as primary motivating factors in agrarian disorder. Such an analysis counters the premise promulgated by Samuel Clark that the land war was a 'challenging collectivity' of the various sections of the tenant population against landlordism.⁷³ Undoubtedly, the Land League did unify and mobilise varying groups within society in a widespread agitation against landlordism. However, the simplistic ideology of the movement and its failure to acknowledge or address the economic realities of agrarian society led to serious internal divisions. This divisiveness was largely drawn out of complicated land disputes which had their origins in the agrarian economic activity of tenants during the 1870s.

3.4: Government versus Land League: polarisation of society.

While the development of the Land League signalled the emergence of extensive hostility towards landlordism, the state and government increasingly became the focus of league criticism. As the agitation wore on, much hostility developed towards the R.I.C. Clashes between the police and mobs of people became common. As early as July 1880 police accompanying bailiffs at an eviction were attacked by rioters with stones and bottles.⁷⁴ During league public meetings there was often a threat of violence against the police. When a meeting of the league was held in Ballyduff in October a full scale riot broke out after a police reporter attempted to get on the platform.⁷⁵ In December three riots were reported by the R.I.C. in the county. During one of these riots, the house of a man who had prosecuted a member of the Land League for assault in Listowel was set upon by a mob.⁷⁶ When the police arrived to disperse the crowd they were met with a burning barrel of paraffin oil and stone throwers, and it took them two hours to disperse the crowd.⁷⁷ Increased antagonism towards the police by members of the league was apparent. In November a confidential report from the R.I.C. county inspector investigated the character of a leading Tralee Leaguer and suspected Fenian, Michael Power. In the

⁷³ For an overview of both arguments see Samuel Clark, 'The importance of agrarian classes: agrarian class structure and collective action in nineteenth-century Ireland' in P.J. Drudy (ed.), *Ireland: Land, politics and people* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 11-36; David Fitzpatrick, 'Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland' in Drudy, *Land*, pp 37-76.

⁷⁴ *K.S.*, 16 July 1880.

⁷⁵ *K.S.*, 15 Oct. 1880.

⁷⁶ *Return of all agrarian outrages reported by the R.I.C. between 1 Jan. 1880 and 31 Jan. 1881, giving particulars of crime, arrests, and results of proceedings*, pp 38-44, H.C., 1881 (6) lxxvii, 273.

⁷⁷ *K.S.*, 1 Feb. 1881. This information was given before an inquiry into the riot in Listowel.

report the county inspector commented that up until recently the police in the district didn't consider Power a 'violent or turbulent character'. During the rioting at the election for the Tralee Borough in March 1880 Power 'was a figure holding order and preserving the peace and gave very great assistance to the constabulary in doing so'. However, in October 1880, during the aforementioned league demonstration at Ballyduff, the county inspector 'was much surprised he [Power] allowed stones to be thrown at the constabulary' and stated that 'my opinion of him since then is very much altered'.⁷⁸ Anti-landlord feeling materialised into a large level of antagonism against the police and government.

The politicisation of the agitation into a movement against both landlords and state was fuelled by the government's response. Philip Bull, commenting broadly on the Land League, Plan of Campaign and the United Irish League agitations, highlights a strategy of passive resistance common to those three agrarian movements. He states that

the most substantial advantage of a passive resistance strategy is the dilemma in which it places government, for it creates a challenge to authority which can be confronted only by methods which often serve to facilitate the agitation.⁷⁹

The degree to which the land agitation can be described as a form of 'passive resistance' is debatable. Bew has highlighted that the 'rent at the point of the bayonet' policy of the Land League was in effect an offensive strategy.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the intimidation, outrage and public disorder that dominated much of the agitation were products of direct action by the protagonists. However, Bull has correctly identified that governmental responses to the land war exacerbated the situation and propelled the movement. This was particularly demonstrated by the arrest of the leaders of the Land League in November 1880 on charges of conspiracy, leading to public outcry.⁸¹ By late January the 'state trial' ended with the acquittal of the Land League leaders owing to a jury disagreement.⁸² It has been contended that the real importance of this trial for Gladstone's Liberal government was to demonstrate the impotence of the ordinary law in order to justify the forthcoming

⁷⁸ Report on the character of Michael Power, 30 Dec. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1881 1221).

⁷⁹ Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism*, p. 118.

⁸⁰ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 124.

⁸¹ Margaret O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a Nationalist Ireland: criminality, land and the law under Forster and Balfour* (Cork, 1994), pp 62-70.

⁸² Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 145.

coercion legislation.⁸³ However, it hinted at official desperation and ‘was a lame, hopeless attempt to assert the authority of Dublin authority’, which only enhanced the position and popularity of the league and its leaders.⁸⁴

In Kerry, anti-government feeling became even more pronounced with the arrest of the leading members of the Tralee branch of the Land League in January 1881. On the 7 January 1881 R.I.C. officers entered a branch meeting of the Tralee Land League and arrested the officers and committee members. They were charged with having

illegally and seditiously formed themselves into a court for the purpose of trying questions touching the occupation of land in this county and have taken upon themselves to adjudicate, and have adjudicated on such cases, and have made certain orders unlawfully and without any lawful authority so to do, have exercised coercive jurisdiction.⁸⁵

The charges were related to five land cases which dominated the Tralee Land League in the months since its inception. In other regions in the country the government brought legal proceedings against local Land League figures. Within a number of days twelve leading members of the Mullinavat branch of the Land League in county Kilkenny were arrested on boycotting charges.⁸⁶ Similar to the ‘state trials’ occurring concurrently in Dublin, the case of the Tralee Leaguers became a test of the law in the county.

The arrests propelled Kerry to the forefront of the agitation. Two days after the detainments Michael Davitt arrived in Tralee for a demonstration to protest against the action of the government. The parish priest for the area, Father O’Leary, an opponent of the league, urged the government to suppress the meeting on the grounds that it would lead to abusive speeches and boycotting.⁸⁷ In consequence of O’Leary’s advice and the increasingly volatile situation concerning the arrests in Tralee, the meeting was suppressed. When Davitt arrived at Clogher (five miles from Tralee) for the meeting he was met by a large force of police and army under the control of the resident magistrate, Bodkin. Despite this, Davitt successfully delivered a speech from his wagon. His speech

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland: politics and war, 1798-1998* (Oxford, 1999), p. 120.

⁸⁵ *K.S.*, 7 Jan. 1881. Those arrested were; Timothy Harrington (president of the league and editor of the *Kerry Sentinel*), Michael Lyons (draper), Thomas O’Rourke (secretary of the league and publican), John Kelly (draper), Henry Brassill (editor of *Kerry Independent*), John Talbot (butter merchant and shopkeeper), Jeremiah Leahy (tenant farmer), and Michael Leahy.

⁸⁶ *F.J.*, 10 Jan. 1880.

was indicative of the increased antagonism amongst the league towards both the police and the state. He commented:

from what has occurred today, and what has taken place throughout Ireland for the past week I think the administration of justice in Ireland would not suffer if the whole of them bag and luggage left the country... however they are the party in power, they represent the law in this country, and they have bayonets and buckshot and everything else behind them.⁸⁸

He also urged that the traders arrested should get four times more trade.

Following the arrests, the case of the government quickly turned into farce. In the initial inquiry into the charges brought against the league members, a lack of sufficient evidence to prosecute the prisoners was apparent. The government lawyers relied on information from the individuals called before the league, to provide evidence of the existence of the 'courts'. Under the public glare witness after witness sided with the league. When William Hillard was asked did he attend a court hearing after being summoned by the league out of a sense of fear, he merely replied: 'I would not expect that I would be injured in my business'. Another witness, Laurence Redmond, secretary to the Tralee Harbour Board, stated he attended the league court on his own free will. When Patrick Divane came before the inquiry as a possible witness for the government, he stated that 'he was heart and soul with the objectives of the league'.⁸⁹ As the three day inquiry developed, it became increasingly clear the government would not acquire enough evidence to prosecute. In an attempt to connect Thomas O'Rourke with handwritten letters summoning people to come before the league, the inquiry called a shop assistant who had previously been in his employment. Despite working for O'Rourke for five or six years, he believed: 'I would not know my own handwriting at times' and failed to identify the writing when it was exhibited to him.⁹⁰ When a reporter for the *Kerry Sentinel*, who appeared before the inquiry, was asked for his notes on meetings he had reported on, he said they were lost. Thereafter he declined to answer the government solicitors' questions of meetings he had attended, on the grounds that the case was a

⁸⁷ Fr O'Leary to Chief Secretary's Office, 3 Jan. 1881(N.A.I., CSO RP, 1881 1702/632).

⁸⁸ *F.J.*, 10 Jan. 1881.

⁸⁹ *F.J.*, 12 Jan. 1881.

⁹⁰ *F.J.*, 13 Jan. 1881.

prosecution for conspiracy, and he would therefore incriminate himself if he gave evidence.⁹¹

The prosecuting solicitors were further undermined by a robust performance from the prisoners' legal defence. During one cross examination of a witness, Broderick, the prisoner's main solicitor, cited the clauses of a supposed lease from Lord Headley to depict the harshness of landlordism. The lease consisted of prohibitive restrictions such as preventing tenants from having more than one dog or giving a neighbour a basket of turf or lime.⁹² When the government prosecutors got a witness to state he had received intimidating threatening letters after proceedings in a league meeting concerning him, Broderick suggested that police had sent them. A combination of the hostility of the witnesses called and the robust defence of the prisoners made the inquiry and the government look absurd. Within a month the prisoners were released without charge.⁹³ This provided the league with a propaganda and moral victory over the police and government ensuring that public opinion would readily identify with its methods.

The arrests had a decisive effect on the league in the county. The large number of divisive land cases that came before branch meetings threatened to undermine the movement. Also, many had little to do with landlord-tenant relations and official Land League policy. With the arrest of the Tralee Leaguers, branches quickly turned away from hearing cases in fear of similar action. At the initial meeting of the Ballymacelligot branch it was stated: 'we are not going to hold a court, either civil, religious or ecclesiastic. We have simply to discuss our grievances in an orderly and a peaceful manner amongst ourselves.'⁹⁴ During a meeting of the Killarney branch the president, Geoffrey O'Donoghue (son of The O'Donoghue), said that they wouldn't take any cases at present 'but [were] to go on enrolling members and keep the league on its legs'.⁹⁵ When a case concerning a land issue came before the Listowel branch, the president postponed it, stating that 'a discussion of this kind was too loose'. The policy of the league in the Listowel region was clearly defined with the following statement by the president:

⁹¹ *F.J.*, 15 Jan. 1881.

⁹² *F.J.*, 12 Jan. 1881.

⁹³ *K.S.*, 12 Feb. 1881.

⁹⁴ *K.S.*, 28 Jan. 1881.

Bodies of tenants ought to come forward where their rents are too high, and let the public see there was good grounds for the present agitation. In fact the principle position of the Land League at present is a machinery of public opinion. In a few months the coercion bill will be passed and it is necessary to be very cautious as the Lord Lieutenant would have the power of putting any man-be he priest or layman-into the body of the gaol without trial. At the same time it is necessary to show that we are not afraid, and to show by public opinion that our cause is a just one, and that we have reason to complain. We must act bold and determined, but at the same time within the limits of the law.⁹⁶

The effect of the Tralee arrests moved branches away from holding league courts not just in Kerry but countrywide.⁹⁷

3.5: New direction of Land League policy: rent at the point of the bayonet.

Once Harrington was released he set about reorganising the Land League in the county. During February 1881 Harrington, along with Michael Boyton (he was recently acquitted after the failure of the 'state trials') held a number of demonstrations in the county.⁹⁸ The recent imprisonment of both Harrington and Boyton provided them with a new level of popularity and status. This was demonstrated when the president of the local league in Caherciveen, Fr Lawlor, described Harrington as having 'fearlessly fought the battles of the people, the magistrates have complimented him in their own peculiar fashion by keeping him in jail'.⁹⁹ Utilising their prominent status Harrington and Boyton reshaped the methods of the movement. During a meeting held in Abbeydorney, Boyton outlined new legalistic techniques to undermine landlords. The meeting 'comprised all the principal farmers in the parish'.¹⁰⁰ Large tenant farmers such as Florence O'Sullivan who held a 150 acre farm were reported as in attendance.¹⁰¹ Boyton advised these tenants to fight the landlord for the rent up until a certain point in the courts and then hand in the

⁹⁵ *K.S.*, 8 Feb. 1881.

⁹⁶ *K.S.*, 1 Feb. 1881.

⁹⁷ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 124

⁹⁸ Michael Boyton was an Irish-American nationalist who had spent much of his youth on a farm near Kildare town. By 1881 he was one of the first to be arrested under the P.P.P. Act leading to much outcry in the U.S.A. over the arrest of an American citizen. He is credited with playing a significant role in giving the Land League a firm foothold outside of Connaught; Thomas Nelson, *The land war in county Kildare* in Maynooth Historical Series, no. 3, (Maynooth, 1985), p. 18; Bew, *Land and the national question*, pp 237-8.

⁹⁹ *K.S.*, 8 Mar. 1881.

¹⁰⁰ *K.S.*, 18 Feb. 1881.

¹⁰¹ *Bessborough comm...*, vol. iii... *evidence...*, pp 767-76.

debt at the last moment. This method placed the legal costs on the landlord, which he stated averaged £20.¹⁰² In a definite indication of the large farmer bias of this strategy, Boyton told tenants that they may have to bear some cost (the ability or willingness of small land holders to pay such costs would have been limited). Furthermore, this activity paralleled previous patterns of protest carried out by the prosperous tenantry during the tithe war.¹⁰³ This policy formulated the offensive strategy of the league known as 'rent at the point of the bayonet'. The new policy also demonstrated the reality of the motivations of tenant farmers, particularly larger ones, for joining the league. Although league activists still called for a peasant proprietorship and the abolition of landlordism on platforms, the policy was essentially moderate and designed to achieve concessions within a continuing landlord-tenant relationship.¹⁰⁴ Boyton and Harrington made similar addresses to meetings of the Land League in Castleisland, Killarney, Dingle, Tralee and Caherciveen.¹⁰⁵ The arrest and subsequent release of the Tralee Leaguers placed Timothy Harrington at the forefront of the movement in the county. This provided him with the platform to concentrate on the official league policy of 'rent at the point of a bayonet'. Importantly, the arrests also greatly discouraged the holding of league 'courts'. This had the effect of avoiding the complicated land cases that were leading to discord and disunion between league members. Despite the efforts of the government, by February 1881, the Land League appeared more unified and stronger than before in Kerry.

The level of support for the Land League was demonstrated in the 1881 poor law election for the Tralee Board of Guardians. Local branches orchestrated voters ensuring that twenty-six out of thirty elected guardians supported the league. However, this was not enough to unseat the *ex-officio* chairman and landlord, Major Rowan, who retained his position in a vote of the guardians by twenty-nine to twenty-six. After the election Timothy Harrington published the names of voters in the Tralee electoral division and how they voted.¹⁰⁶ This 'snapshot' of voting during the height of Land League influence

¹⁰² *K.S.*, 18 Feb. 1881.

¹⁰³ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁴ Comerford, 'The land war and the politics of distress, 1877-82', in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vol. VI Ireland under the Union, II, 1870-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 47.

¹⁰⁵ *K.S.*, 22 Feb. 1881.

¹⁰⁶ *K.S.*, 29 Mar. 1881. This provides a valuable insight into voting behaviour during poor law guardians. Although such elections were under open voting no poll books have been discovered, see Feingold, *Revolt of the tenantry*, p. 128.

demonstrated who supported the movement. In a highly significant contribution to the historiography of the period, William Feingold has extensively analysed these election results.¹⁰⁷ Out of a sample of 319 voters of which seventy six percent were shopkeepers and tenant farmers, Feingold uncovered a number of factors concerning who supported the Land League. While the Land League succeeded in gaining a majority of votes from shopkeepers in Tralee town, it was slimmer than might be expected and it is clear that almost half the Tralee shopkeepers were not ready to throw their weight behind the league. The analysis goes on to highlight strong support for the league amongst small shopkeepers but Feingold states that 'these variations are inconclusive and do not establish any significant differences in the degree of support offered to the league by shopkeepers of varying size'.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, the voting patterns of tenant farmers are highlighted to some extent. Although the sample of fifty-six tenants is limited and as Feingold contends 'not representative of all farmers in the region' he does highlight a number of significant trends. Large (valuation of holdings at £50 or more) and small farmers (valuation of holdings between £4- £19) were more likely to support the Land League than middling farmers (valuation of holdings between £20- £49).¹⁰⁹ The high support from larger tenants may have been related to the 'rent at the point of the bayonet policy' and the redirecting of the league objectives towards this group. Despite these developments, the election results depict that the league maintained support from smaller tenants.

Increasingly the Catholic clergy began to emerge at the forefront of the movement. The role of the priests in the league was initially limited. No Catholic cleric joined the Tralee branch of the Land League and at times clerical figures failed to attend land demonstrations. Although never outwardly stated, this may have been as a result of the radical forces present in the agitation. However, by 1881 the clergy emerged as a powerful section of the leadership of the Land League in Kerry. The leading role of the clergy in the local movement was expressed during the holding of a mass Land League demonstration in Tralee town in early March 1881. In a meeting, which the *Kerry*

¹⁰⁷ Feingold, 'Land League power: the Tralee poor-law election of 1881' in Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly (ed.), *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest, 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983), pp 285-310, idem, *Revolt of the tenantry*, pp 123-37.

¹⁰⁸ Feingold, *Revolt of the tenantry*, p. 134.

Sentinel claimed 25,000 people attended, twenty priests were reported on the platform. In an editorial, the *Sentinel* viewed this as a positive development and stated that it 'will inspire still more determined enthusiasm into the tenant farmers of Kerry, who confidently look to them for manly and Christian guidance'.¹¹⁰ The prominence of both large farmers and Catholic clergy illustrated the persistence of pre-land war rural local leadership structures in the Land League.¹¹¹ Similarly, the on-going arrests of the more radical sections of the local league leadership under the P.P.P. Act created a vacuum which the clergy filled.¹¹² The reasserting of the power and influence of the clergy appeared to dampen the initial 'radical' surge of the agrarian agitation. During the last three months of 1880 a large-scale outbreak of agrarian outrages occurred with 220 outrages reported to the police in the county.¹¹³ This escalation of rural crime along with an ever more trenchant statement of the league's demand for compulsory land purchase and peasant proprietorship, illustrated that the radical agrarian cause held sway in the movement.¹¹⁴ During the first three months of 1881 the number of agrarian outrages dropped significantly to ninety-nine.¹¹⁵ By 1881 the influence of radical agrarians who were willing to use violence and intimidation to carry out the objectives of the league appeared to be somewhat lessened. This was most probably a direct result of the moderation of the league demands in the 'rent at the point of the bayonet' policy, the increased role of the Catholic clergy and the anticipation of the forthcoming coercive legislation.

3.6: April –Sept: From Land Bill to suppression.

The Land League was far from a homogenous group. Various sections within the movement had varying stances on its objectives and methods. These divisions were accentuated with the introduction of Gladstone's land bill in April 1881. The bill

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ *K.S.*, 8 Mar. 1881.

¹¹¹ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 128.

¹¹² Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the modern Irish state, 1878-86* (Philadelphia, 1975), p. 113.

¹¹³ *Return of number of agrarian outrages in each county in Ireland reported to the R.I.C., 1880*, pp 11-4, H.C., 1881 (12), lxxvii, 619.

¹¹⁴ Alvin Jackson, *Home rule: an Irish history 1800- 2000* (London, 2003), p. 51.

¹¹⁵ *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the R.I.C., 1881*, pp 4-6, H.C., 1882 (8), lv, 1.

essentially granted the traditional tenant-right demand of the 'three Fs', although large sections of the tenantry were excluded from benefiting from it (leaseholders and tenants in arrears). The legislation, which provided for the regulation of rent by the Land Commission, attracted support from 'moderate' leaguers and undoubtedly enticed support from the large tenant farmer class. The left-wing and more militant elements of the league, led by Davitt and Devoy, endeavoured to reject the bill.¹¹⁶ Similarly, John Dillon believed the bill was designed to push small farmers from the Land League, which would lead to its disintegration.¹¹⁷ In late April 1881 a national convention was held by the Land League to debate the merits of the bill. Branches with over five hundred members were entitled to appoint two delegates to the convention.¹¹⁸ Eight representatives from Kerry branches attended the meeting. In a clear sign of the increased clerical involvement in the movement, five of the eight were priests.¹¹⁹ The convention itself was firmly under the control of Parnell (Davitt was imprisoned) and a moderate stance was adopted. Although the bill was vilified by the majority of the speakers at the convention, it was resolved to allow the parliamentary party to attempt to improve the bill through amendments.¹²⁰

Importantly, the bill provided for the re-emergence of the Catholic clerical hierarchy to the centre of popular politics. Overcoming past divisions in the clergy, a meeting of the bishops was held in Maynooth to discuss the bill. In a unified manner they offered a general approval of the proposed legislation but set out a number of amendments that should be made when the bill passed through parliament.¹²¹ This development according to William O'Brien, led to Archbishop Croke succeeding 'in winning back the broad basis of the league and also in winning back the clergy's privileged relationship to it'.¹²²

Within Kerry the bill highlighted divisions between groups loyal to the Land League and Parnell, and more 'moderate' clerics and large tenant farmers. Throughout the 1870s many large tenant farmers had frequently failed to support home rule and attempted to concentrate the energies of the K.T.D.A. on landlord-tenant relations along

¹¹⁶ Feingold, *Revolt of the tenantry*, p. 139

¹¹⁷ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 163.

¹¹⁸ *F.J.*, 3 Feb. 1881.

¹¹⁹ *K.S.*, 26 Apr. 1881.

¹²⁰ Jordan, *Mayo*, p. 306-7.

¹²¹ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the modern Irish state, 1878-86*, p. 111.

the parameters of the 'three Fs' leading to extensive divisions within the movement. Although the Land League succeeded in incorporating the support of such farmers, their actual control over these recruits was 'remarkably loose'.¹²³ By April 1881 the views of this class in Kerry found a voice in the newly established *Kerry Independent*. Although its editor, Henry Brassill, was a leading leaguer and was arrested in January 1881 over the holding of league courts, his newspaper failed to take the official league policy on the bill and enthusiastically welcomed it. It stated: 'after a careful perusal of the Land Bill introduced by Mr Gladstone we have no hesitation in pronouncing it a great measure, with some very notable shortcomings'.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the intervention of the bishops also led to much support for the bill. At a meeting of the Ardfert Land League the president, Father O'Donoghue, stated the bill was acceptable if the bishops' amendments were granted. He also 'hoped the Irish members would not retard, but rather endeavor to facilitate its passing in an improved state if possible through the House of Commons'.¹²⁵ After a meeting of the Abbeydorney League it was reported: 'the general sense of the members present having been taken on the leading principles of the bill, it was found that the measure, if amended, as advised by the bishops of Ireland, would meet the universal approval of the farmers of the country'.¹²⁶ The bill, helped by the support of the bishops, received a very favourable response from some sections of the movement in the county.

However, this favourable reaction was at variance with the official policy of the Land League. The April convention declared that only the abolition of landlordism could be considered as a final solution to the land question although it left the parliamentary party at liberty to accept or reject the bill as they pleased.¹²⁷ The *Kerry Sentinel* remained within the parameters of the league's reaction to the bill. Commenting on the convention it highlighted the fact that 'a large and undoubted majority were in favour of the immediate rejection of the bill'. The newspaper also commented: 'it is difficult for anyone who peruses the new land bill to escape the conclusion that it was specially

¹²² Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 168

¹²³ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 126.

¹²⁴ *K.I.*, 14 Apr. 1881.

¹²⁵ *K.S.*, 10 May 1881.

¹²⁶ *K.I.*, 9 May 1881.

¹²⁷ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the modern Irish state, 1878-86*, p. 111.

devised to see Irishmen at variance with one another'.¹²⁸ Demonstrating the newspaper's, and Harrington's, loyalty to Parnell it concluded that 'Parnell and his trusted followers in parliament had amply proved themselves worthy, to the fullest extent, of the confidence of the people, and the unanimous vote of the convention assured them of the fact'.¹²⁹

Other reaction to the bill in the county was negative. Despite the stance of the bishops certain Catholic clerical figures condemned it. At a land demonstration in Ballylongford Fr Moynihan heavily criticised the act, believing that 'though some persons consider the bill a boon for Ireland, he looked upon it as a strangled, unarmed, and worthless bill'.¹³⁰ Furthermore, radical agrarianism remained a constant factor in the on-going agitation. April witnessed a significant rise in agrarian outrages from any of the previous three months with fifty-two outrages reported.¹³¹ By the end of April it was apparent that a range of different opinions and interest groups existed within the broad land movement. Reaction to Gladstone's land bill varied from a general approval from Catholic clergy and larger farmers to the much more muted response by the Parnellites. Also, radical agrarians who were often stimulated by the extreme rhetoric of the league remained prominent in the county.

Notwithstanding the introduction of the land bill into parliament, the agitation continued in the country. By April 1881 landlords had reorganised in the form of the Property Defence Association and provided a more effective resistance to the agitation.¹³² This signalled the effective landlord counter-offensive to the land war and the actions of the Land League. The organisation was initially established in Dublin in December 1880 by a group of landlords and agents. To counter the league's 'rent at the point of the bayonet' policy, landlords and the P.D.A. began bringing actions against tenants for an ordinary debt to recover rent.¹³³ Legally creditors could seize removable property from a debtor's land to redeem a bad debt. In the case of tenant farmers, this mainly meant livestock and agricultural produce such as harvested crops. The landlord, agent or bailiffs

¹²⁸ *K.S.*, 26 Apr. 1881.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *K.S.*, 29 Apr. 1881.

¹³¹ *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the R.I.C., 1881*, p. 7, H.C., 1882 (8), lv, 1.

¹³² L.P. Curtis, 'Landlord responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-87' in *Eire-Ireland*, xxvii (2003), p. 172.

¹³³ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 156; Adam Pole, 'Sheriffs' sales during the land war, 1879-82' in *I.H.S.*, xxxiv, no. 136 (Nov. 2005), pp 386-402.

could seize the goods and enter the tenants holding by opening gates and crossing fences. The process was cost effective and free of much legal wrangling for the landlord. The greatest advantage of this procedure, however, was the quickness in which it could be enforced. The landlord could seize the tenant's goods one day after a single gale of rent had fallen.¹³⁴ This was far quicker than enacting evictions which took anywhere between six to twelve months to carry out. Importantly, the sheriff was also enabled to sell the tenant's interest in the holding, and if the tenant didn't 'buy in' at the sale he lost all right to redemption and any legal claim to the farm. This effectively undermined the successful league tactic of withholding the rent until the very last moment during a long drawn out eviction process. Organised by the P.D.A., landlords began undertaking the sale of tenants stock and interest at sheriffs' sales in what emerged as one of the most common events in the land war.¹³⁵

In April the P.D.A. became active in Kerry. The first significant sale occurred in Killarney when the interest of nine farms on the Kenmare estate was put up for auction.¹³⁶ Within a number of days the cattle of two prominent tenants was seized in the Tralee vicinity.¹³⁷ One of the tenants, John Kelliher, was a leading member of the K.T.D.A. and was prominent in resisting rent rises on the Kenmare estate during the 1870s.¹³⁸ In May the interest of four tenants' holdings was sold in Killarney and fourteen in Listowel.¹³⁹ In July the interest in twenty-five tenants' holdings went for sale in Tralee.¹⁴⁰ Previously the league simply prevented any bidding at such sales but by this stage the P.D.A. provided agents to bid for the farms. If the tenant failed to 'buy in' the P.D.A. agent would get the interest and employ emergency men as caretakers on the farms. The official league response was to allow the tenants to pay the debt and costs and regain the holding. In turn, the league would reimburse the tenant for the legal costs incurred. However, this largely failed. Out of the first eight sales of interest in the county, the Land League only managed to buy one. During one batch of sales in Killarney, the

¹³⁴ Thomas de Moleyns, *The land owners and agents practical guide* (8th edn, London, 1899), p. 375.

¹³⁵ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 156; Pole, 'Sheriffs' sales during the land war', p. 387.

¹³⁶ *K.E.P.*, 9 Apr. 1881.

¹³⁷ *K.E.P.*, 13 Apr. 1881.

¹³⁸ *Guy's Munster Directory 1886*, p. 215; *TC*, 13 Apr. 1875 and 25 Jan. 1876. His rent was raised from £67 to £100 by Hussey.

¹³⁹ *K.E.P.*, 14 May 1881, *K.E.P.*, 21 May 1881.

¹⁴⁰ *K.E.P.*, 2 July 1881.

local league official proposed one shilling above what the 'emergency man' offered but was refused by the sheriff who would only take bids in pounds. The leaguer refused to go higher and the farms were lost.¹⁴¹ During the Listowel sale in May, the league successfully protected tenants from losing the interest in their holdings. Timothy Harrington, who by this stage had been promoted as the leading league official in Munster, and John Stack, vice-president of the Listowel League were present. The significance of the sale was heightened by the presence of Goddard, the leading agent of the P.D.A. Of the fourteen sales, two tenants settled before the auction with their landlords, two farms were bought by the P.D.A., and the remaining eight were bought by the league. Of the farms bought by the league a twenty per cent abatement, which had been offered by the landlord to the tenants if they paid their rent, was lost.¹⁴² At the next sheriff's sale in early July in Tralee, the league bought the interest in all the twenty-five farms for sale bar one.¹⁴³ Evidently the landlord policy proved extremely effective. While the process of eviction was a long and costly affair, the threat of selling the farmer's interest proved an immediate method of getting rents.

The Land League's position of paying the legal fees of tenants proved costly. One large tenant who had his interest sold in Listowel had an annual rent of £200 and £34 costs.¹⁴⁴ A tenant from the Duagh region who had a debt as low as £21 had legal costs of £13.¹⁴⁵ The Newtownsandess branch sent a bill of £57 to the Land League executive after defending five tenants at sales.¹⁴⁶ Although in May Timothy Harrington claimed the league had spent over £2,000 in the county since its emergence in October 1880, local branches found it increasingly difficult to extract money promised by the central authority.¹⁴⁷ After the Killarney League had failed to receive communication from the central branch concerning a request to aid tenants who had the interest in their holdings sold, members became increasingly agitated. During a branch meeting it was 'complained strongly of the delay that had taken place on the part of the Dublin League. They [league members] were tired of that body.' One member asked: 'where was the

¹⁴¹ *K.E.P.*, 9 Apr. 1881, *K.E.P.*, 14 May 1881.

¹⁴² *K.E.P.*, 21 May 1881.

¹⁴³ *K.E.P.*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁴⁴ *K.E.P.*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁴⁵ Duagh Land League to Land League executive, 28 July 1881 (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 8,291).

¹⁴⁶ Newtownsandess to Land League executive (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 8,291).

money going to?', and another stated that Galway was getting six times more funds than Kerry.¹⁴⁸ By this stage the central executive of the league attempted to regulate the dispersal of funds by creating extra bureaucracy. By July 1881 claimants had to fill out a document which had the signatures of the president, treasurer and secretary of the local branch; vouchers demonstrating the loss of money, and a written document of the official undertaking to pay the expenses given on the part of the league.¹⁴⁹ As some local leaguers complained of the lack of funds, Parnellite figures criticised tenants for their over reliance on league money. During a meeting of the Tralee Land League, John Kelly who by this stage had emerged as one of Timothy Harrington's closet allies in the branch, stated:

it was very mean of the tenant farmers to be depending on the people of America for sustenance in the present agitation. The Irish people in America had to earn their money by their sweat and the farmers should not expect the Land League to assist them when they got into some slight trouble.¹⁵⁰

During another meeting of the Tralee League Harrington chastised tenants who failed to pay their subscriptions to the branch. He commented:

it was the farmers of the country who were most interested in the present agitation, and it was they that should keep it up and not the men who were going about the country as the leaders risking a great deal, and in danger of being arrested at any moment, and he thought the least the farmers ought to do was to pay in the paltry subscription that was asked each year.¹⁵¹

The selling of tenants' interest at sheriffs' sales greatly undermined the league and forced the executive to change policy. From early July the central branch informed local leagues that the legal costs of tenants who 'bought in' would no longer be paid by the league.¹⁵² In early July, the first sales under the new league policy were held in Tralee. The Tralee branch of the league advised that some of the farms should go to landlords and that the cost of emergency men to hold the farms would cripple them.¹⁵³ However, tenants showed a distinct unwillingness to lose the interest in their holdings and 'bought in' in all

¹⁴⁷ *K.E.P.*, 18 May 1881.

¹⁴⁸ *K.E.P.*, 11 May 1881.

¹⁴⁹ Irish National Land League form of application for costs and expenses (N.L.L., Land League papers, MS 8,291).

¹⁵⁰ *K.I.*, 27 June 1881.

¹⁵¹ *K.E.P.*, 18 May 1881.

¹⁵² Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 172.

¹⁵³ *K.S.*, 3 July 1881.

the twelve sales.¹⁵⁴ In August the interest in twenty-three farms went for sale in Tralee. The league was some way successful in preventing tenants from buying in. Nine of the twenty three went to the P.D.A. Tensions emerged during the sale when Michael Power, representing the league, chastised tenants for paying the debts.¹⁵⁵ The increasingly militant policy of the league failed to receive support from striking tenants who demonstrated an unwillingness to lose their entire legal rights over their holdings.

Further tensions within the movement emerged after the executive refused to reimburse tenants who previously 'bought in' at sheriff's sales. By August 1881 the legal costs incurred by two tenants during the sheriff's sale in Listowel in the previous May hadn't been paid by the central executive, despite that 'on the day of the sale [Timothy Harrington] distinctly and publicly promised them that the costs suffered by them would be made good by the league'.¹⁵⁶ The application from the Listowel branch for their refund was turned down by the central executive, who stated that the tenants received an abatement on account of the actions of the league, which covered their legal expenses.¹⁵⁷ In reply, the president of the Listowel Land League, Fr Moynihan, complained that other tenants on the property broke the rent strike and settled with their landlord incurring no legal costs and those who acted on league advice were being punished. His anguish was palatable when he stated:

we made promises at the time. Now these men must see they were deceived. We were deceived ourselves and under these conditions it will be impossible to work. This terrible fight has cost me as much anxiety and trouble and work as any other man, but if I am treated in this manner I must lose heart.¹⁵⁸

By autumn 1881 much of the local structure of the league was divided.

At a national level Parnell was increasingly criticised over the land bill that was been debated in the House of Commons. His abstention from voting on it brought criticisms from the right-wing element of the movement. *The Nation*, the *Freeman's*

¹⁵⁴ *K.E.P.*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁵⁵ *K.E.P.*, 3 Aug. 1881.

¹⁵⁶ Rev Arthur Moynihan to the Land League executive, 8 Aug. 1881 (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 8,291).

¹⁵⁷ Land League executive to Rev Casey, Listowel, 4 Aug. 1881 (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 8,291).

¹⁵⁸ Rev Arthur Moynihan to the Land League executive, 8 Aug. 1881 (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 8,291).

Journal, and Archbishop Croke, all criticised him sharply over the issue.¹⁵⁹ In Kerry these concerns found voice again in the *Kerry Independent*. After Parnell failed to vote on the bill the editorial of the newspaper stated: 'we are sorry and surprised that his Grace's [Archbishop Croke] advice has not been taken [by Parnell]'.¹⁶⁰ By August, with the enactment of the Land Act just a couple of weeks away, the newspaper's criticism of Parnell and the league's official policy towards the legislation intensified. In an editorial the *Kerry Independent* condemned the league and stated: 'instead of looking for what is practically impossible at present; let all loudly insist on getting what the bill in its present shape confers'.¹⁶¹ In the next edition it further vilified the league when it stated:

we regard the real interest of the tenant farmers as the object of the present agitation. The extreme Parnellite party seem to place that agitation itself above and before the interest of the people... it is, to our mind, ridiculous to reject the land bill... we write as a thorough land leaguer, but without hope and reward.¹⁶²

In turn, the *Independent* became embroiled in a war of words with the Parnellite *Sentinel*. This schism in the league ranks was significant considering that the editors of both the newspapers, Henry Brassill and Timothy Harrington, were imprisoned together the previous January on charges of holding league courts in the town. The disintegration of the movement in the county was furthered when The O'Donoghue voted for the bill in parliament. In a retort to Parnell's accusation that those who voted for the bill were 'traitors to their country and the wishes of the party', The O'Donoghue attacked Parnell and the league in an open letter to the *Freeman's Journal* by stating:

the truth is that the bill is as good as it is in spite of the attitude assumed by Mr Parnell towards the government and the Liberal Party. His bullying tone rendered concessions difficult by giving them the damaging appearance of having been extorted under threat; and I am convinced that to his mismanagement, to the very loathing his conduct must have created in the minds of the government and the Liberal party, we owe the exclusion of leaseholders prior to 1870 from the benefits of the bill... Now that the farmers have got a court for the settlement of rent, Mr Parnell advises them not to use it, or at all events to wait till he has manoeuvred so as to obtain some adverse decisions, which may give him an excuse for questioning the impartiality of the tribunal and a pretext for recommending the people not to avail themselves of the only means of getting out

¹⁵⁹ Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry*, p. 139.

¹⁶⁰ *K.I.*, 12 May 1881.

¹⁶¹ *K.I.*, 4 Aug. 1881.

¹⁶² *K.I.*, 8 Aug. 1881

of their difficulties. I trust the tenantry will turn a deaf ear to such treacherous council; that every man who feels his rent too high will go before the Commission, and that the farmers as a body will give the Land League executive to understand that their duty is to apply the vast resources at their command to securing an equitable adjustment of rent.¹⁶³

The introduction of the Land Act accentuated the divisions within the broad Nationalist movement that the Land League had previously overcome.

The Land League was thrown into further turmoil with the arrest of Parnell in September 1881 under the Protection of Person and Property Act. Following quickly after his arrest, Parnell yielded to radical elements in his party and announced the 'No Rent Manifesto'. In turn the government suppressed the Land League. The structure of the organisation was destroyed and branch meetings prohibited. Police watched the meeting places of branches and prevented any from taking place.¹⁶⁴ The local organisation of the league was wholly undermined. The P.P.P. Act, in existence since the previous March, was invoked to detain leading local figures of the movement. By the suppression of the league in October twenty-one people had already been arrested under the act in the county.¹⁶⁵ A number of these included the most prominent members of the league. In March, P.D. Kenny, president of the Castleisland branch of the Land League was arrested. By June, Timothy Harrington had also been imprisoned. Other influential league figures arrested in the county included the president of the Tuogh branch of the league and Timothy Dooling.¹⁶⁶ After the suppression of the league more significant figures were arrested in the county. Michael Power and Jeremiah Leahy, leading members of the Tralee and Firies branches respectively, were significant arrests which occurred in a two week period after the suppression of the league.¹⁶⁷ In late October Timothy Harrington,

¹⁶³ Reprinted in *K.E.P.*, 6 Aug. 1881.

¹⁶⁴ After the suppression of the Land League a number of branches attempted to hold meetings but were disrupted by the police, for example see *K.S.*, 23 Oct 1881.

¹⁶⁵ *Return of persons who have been or are in custody under the Protection of Person and Property (Ireland) Act, 1881, up to 31 Mar. 1882*, p. 156, H.C., 1882 (156) lv, 635.

¹⁶⁶ Dooling was central to the League in the northern half of the county. He was a central figure at the first indignant meeting held in April 1880 in Causeway. He was also a significant member of the Lixnaw Land League. See ch 1.

¹⁶⁷ *K.I.*, 24 Oct. 1881, *K.I.*, 10 Nov. 1881. A number of days before his arrest Leahy had written to the central executive of the Ladies Land League stating that he was waiting their instruction for the course of action to be taken, see Leahy to Virginia Lynch, 3 Nov. 1881 (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 17,699 (2)).

incarcerated in Galway Gaol, despondently informed Virginia Lynch of the executive of the Ladies Land League of the effect of the arrests was having on him:

I was very much pained at Dr Kenny's arrest. I have not felt any arrest so much. To what goal are we standing at present? Tis very hard to say. I am in daily expectation of getting a telegram from Tralee announcing my brother's arrest. If that should happen one branch of home industry-*The Kerry Sentinel*-goes down, as I should make no effort to carry it on if he is arrested.¹⁶⁸

The suppression of the Land League and imprisonment of the movement's national and local leaders greatly undermined the movement. The suppression compounded its disintegration as tenant farmers increasingly turned away from the league as its radical undercurrents surfaced. The political vacuum created after the social and political abrasion of the league placed the militant and violent forces at the fore of the agrarian agitation, which unrealistically promulgated the 'no rent manifesto'. The incidence of agrarian outrage rose (in the three month period of Sept.-Nov. 118 outrages were committed compared to seventy for the previous three months in the county) as the agitation entered into its most violent stage.¹⁶⁹

Between January and September 1881 the influence of middling to large tenant farmers became increasingly pronounced over the nature of the movement. The 'rent at the point of bayonet' policy and the subsequent successful landlord reprisal of selling the interest in tenants holdings, demonstrated that the rent war was being fought against a somewhat solvent tenantry who were ultimately bargaining for a significant reduction in rent against their landlords. The league in Kerry, under the direction of Timothy Harrington, intentionally manoeuvred the agitation in this direction and specifically enticed this middle class farmer group into a rent strike. By funding the strike through payment of tenants' legal costs, these tenants had little to lose. For the league, the concentration of the movement on an almost mock rent battle removed the socially radical and ultimately divisive intra-tenantry issues, which had characterised the local activities of the league during the first three months of its existence in the county. However, the league was never a unified hegemony with varying groups and interests existing together in a complex juxtaposition. The large tenant farmers had consistently

¹⁶⁸ Timothy Harrington to Virginia Lynch, 28 Oct 1881 (N.L.I., Land League papers, MS 17,699 (1))

¹⁶⁹ *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the R.I.C., 1881*, pp 9-14.

demonstrated little enthusiasm towards home rule and Parnellism in the late 1870s to the extent that The O'Donoghue successfully reinvented himself into a leader of the nascent agitation in the county. It wasn't until October 1880 that the Parnellites created a branch of the Land League in the county which succeeded in gaining support from tenant farmers. Importantly, a grassroots radicalism, which had been in existence since the start of 1880, played a vital part in the emergence of the league leading to much violence and intimidation. The achievement of the Land League in October 1880 was the unification of these groups into one movement. However, from April 1881 it became increasingly evident that tenant farmers were diverging from the official policy of the Land League. As rent strikes were undermined by the success of counter tactics by landlords; larger tenant farmers, encouraged by the Catholic clergy, increasingly acknowledged the potential benefits of the 1881 Land Act. In an attempt to placate the radical element of the Land League leadership Parnell remained apprehensive towards the legislation. In Kerry, the Harringtons remained loyal to Parnell and promoted the official league policy, although it became increasingly apparent that large sections of the movement would not. The objectives of the larger tenants and clergy were clearly articulated by the *Kerry Independent* and The O'Donoghue voted for the Land Act and called on farmers to enter the courts of the Land Commission. The disintegration of the league was compounded by its suppression in October. The radical agrarian element continued to exist at a local level and began attempting to enforce the 'no rent' manifesto.

Chapter IV:

October 1882-September 1885: The Irish National League, Fenianism and Parnellism.

4.1 Introduction

The outcome of the conference of October 1882 was the complete eclipse, by a purely parliamentary substitute, of what had been a semi-revolutionary organisation. It was in a sense, the overthrow of a movement and the enthronement of a man, the replacing of Nationalism by Parnellism; the investing of the fortunes and guidance of the agitation, both for national self government and land reform, in a leaders nominal dictatorship.¹

With the signing of the Kilmainhan Treaty in April 1882 the Land War, and the agrarian agitation that dominated the previous number of years, was greatly defused. It was within this atmosphere of quietened agrarian relations that the Irish National League was established in October 1882. Founded by Parnell, the new organisation placed him at the head of Nationalist politics. The programme and constitution of the new league, drafted by T.M. Healy and Timothy Harrington, were clearly influenced by Parnell.² The new organisation centred on constitutional politics and attempted to remove agrarian radicalism from popular politics. The left wing agrarian radical element, which had provided much of the leadership of the Land League, was sidelined in the new organisation. Radical agrarians such as John Egan had departed Ireland by the time of the league's emergence. The most agrarian minded parliamentarian, John Dillon, had also vacated the political scene. Although Dillon cited medical reasons for his departure from Irish politics, many suspected that the conservative new direction of the political movement was a motivating factor.³ Some attempt was made to placate the agrarian element with the appointment of Thomas Brennan as the National League's honorary secretary, along with Timothy Harrington. The *Kerry Sentinel* recognised this when it wrote about the leading officials of the National League. It commented that Brennan was

¹ Michael Davitt, *Fall of feudalism: or the story of the Land League revolution* (London, 1904), p. 377.

² T.W. Moody, *Davitt and the Irish revolution, 1846-1882* (Oxford, 1981), p. 543.

³ F.S.L. Lyons, *John Dillon: a biography* (London, 1968), p. 68.

'instinctively a radical of the radicals' while Harrington was 'a man instinctively a conservative as Mr Brennan is naturally a radical'.⁴ However, Brennan, like Dillon and Egan, soon left for America too. Davitt remained in Ireland and did accept membership of the Organising Committee of the new league and supported its programme. Yet, Davitt's influence in the movement and over Nationalist politics in general, was greatly undermined, if not destroyed, by his division with Parnell and other leading Nationalists over his policy of land nationalisation.⁵ With the radical agrarians sidelined, the leadership of the National League was to be dominated by a central clique, loyal to Parnell, intent on supplementing any form of radical agrarian agitation with a conservative constitutional movement signalling a new period for Parnellism.⁶ Some have traced the emergence of Parnellism to October 1879 when the Land League was established, which created an 'alliance of agrarian, constitutional and physical force Nationalism that was Parnellism'.⁷ However, it wasn't until October 1882 and the creation of the National League, with home rule as its central objective, that Parnellism developed into the constitutionalism that became its hallmark during the rest of the decade.

The biggest obstacle of the new movement was the ability of home rule to develop as a popular ideology within the locales of Ireland. According to Hoppen the local realities of such communities led to them 'often maintain[ing] a style of politics only intermittently in step with the stated aims and methods generally held to have dominated Irish history in the nineteenth century'.⁸ While such a localist perspective is particularly relevant to the immediate post-Famine period, a similar trend occurred after the 1874 General Election when the popularity of home rule clearly slumped at a regional level. Few home rule clubs emerged locally and the main form of political activity that developed was that of the Tenant Defence Associations, which were never fully committed to home rule (as the activities of the K.T.D.A. demonstrated). The events of

⁴ *K.S.*, 17 Nov. 1883.

⁵ By this stage Davitt and Parnell had major dissensions over Davitt's land nationalisation policy. For a discussion on Parnell's views on the land question see, Liam Kennedy, 'The economic thought of the nation's lost leader: Charles Stewart Parnell' in D.G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Parnell in perspective* (London, 1991), pp 171- 200.

⁶ Carla King, *Michael Davitt* (Dundalk, 1999), p. 43.

⁷ D.G. Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (3rd edn., London, 1995), p. 207.

⁸ K.T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society* (Oxford, 1984), p. viii.

1879-82, and the emergence of the countrywide structure of the Land League, surpassed the local, and undoubtedly created a more national consciousness. However, the view promulgated by Margaret O'Callaghan that 'the land war can only very partially be understood in terms of local action [and] all significant transformations wrought were due to central leadership and control' must be treated with a degree of trepidation.⁹ Throughout the Land League agitation tenant farmers constantly demonstrated a readiness to act according to their own objectives and needs, as opposed to following official National Land League policy. Furthermore, there is clear evidence of the inefficiency of the central branch's transactions with local leagues depicting a degree of incoherency and disunion in the league's actions.¹⁰ Other deep rooted effects of the 1879-82 agitation were the intertwining of the land and national questions. It has been suggested the land question came close to losing its character as a separate phenomenon, becoming instead 'a metaphor for the larger issue of nationality'.¹¹ However, by 1882 and in the wake of the collapse of the Land League, it was still not widely apparent that tenant farmers would place home rule at the forefront of their aspirations with vigour and support Parnell wished for.

Whatever the opinion of tenants towards home rule in 1882, it is generally assumed that 'the Irish National League under the dominance of the party became the near exclusive forum of Nationalism by late 1885'. Central to this development was the charismatic leadership of Parnell and the bureaucratically controlled National League.¹² The presumption that the Parnellite leadership was the central agent in disseminating a Nationalism that came to dominance in 1885 inculcates historical analysis from 'above'. This analysis counters trends to study events from 'below', which have emerged in modern historiography. Such work concentrates on the importance of social and economic change as determining factors in periods of political upheaval. This approach has been significantly adapted to the modern study of the 1878-82 period. Modern historiography has pointed towards the post-Famine structural changes in Irish society as

⁹ Margaret O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a nationalist Ireland: criminality, land and the law under Foster and Balfour* (Cork, 1994), p. 7.

¹⁰ These issues are dealt with in ch. III.

¹¹ Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (2nd edn., London, 1999), p. 127; Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 95.

explanations for the outbreak of the land agitation. Historical analysis has highlighted a number of themes including; the importance of a united rural-urban bourgeoisie, the general rising expectations of the non-gentry population, and class tensions within Nationalist Ireland, as explanations for the emergence and subsequent development of the land war.¹³ These understandings are centrally tied to depicting large-scale social and economic changes as catalysts for political transformation. However, historiography of the 1882-85 period largely concentrates on Parnell and 'high politics' and little attempt is made to fully understand the popularity of the political ideology of home rule or Parnellism at a local level.¹⁴ Arguably this is understandable considering that Nationalist ideology is inevitably disseminated from 'above' by the leaders and spokesmen of such movements.¹⁵ For the 1882-85 period this appears particularly true when the autocratic National League acted as the 'electioneering machine' for the successful return of Parnellite M.P.s in the 1885 general election.¹⁶ Yet this concentration on politics at a high level fails to offer an analysis of how the agrarian semi revolutionary land war, characterised by local realities and underlined by long term economic and social developments, transformed into a broad Nationalist and constitutional movement with home rule as its focal point. This chapter concentrates on the emergence and popularity of the Irish National League in the 1882-85 period. It demonstrates that the National League failed to gain any significant support from tenant farmers during the initial stages of its development. Furthermore, it highlights that at times local realities related to certain civic issues concerning sports and the creation of butter factories led to alignments between would be Nationalists and gentry figures and Unionist middle class Protestants. Finally, this chapter concentrates on a split in the National League in Tralee town which

¹² Alan O'Day 'Max Weber and leadership, Butt, Parnell and Dillon' in D.G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Ireland in transition* (London, 2004), p. 28.

¹³ Samuel Clark, *Social origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979); Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978); J.S. Donnelly, *Land and the people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975).

¹⁴ Notable exceptions include, Frank Thompson, *The end of liberal Ulster: land agitation and land reform, 1868-86* (Belfast, 2001); Edward Kennedy, *The land movement in Tullaroan, county Kilkenny, 1879-91* in *Maynooth Studies in Local History*: no. 55 (Dublin, 2004).

¹⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1992), p. 11. Hobsbawm goes on to state the necessity of understanding the view from 'below' in interpreting Nationalism and those it was ultimately aimed at.

demonstrated the tensions between the central and local leadership of the movement. These animosities also illustrated the contradictions between the conservative and more radical forces that made up the National League.

4.2 October 1882: establishment of the Irish National League.

With Davitt and radical agrarianism isolated from influencing the National League, Parnell successfully took the mantle of the leadership of Irish Nationalist politics and redirected the focus from the land to the national question. The constitution of the new league placed the attainment of home rule as its principle objective with the land question relegated to secondary importance.¹⁷ This represented a significant move from the farmer dominated politics of the Land League. The new league intended to incorporate support from the various classes within Irish society. Class antagonisms or allegiances were to be overcome for the cause of 'Ireland'. The *Kerry Sentinel* described this stance of the new league in an editorial:

the interests of the farmer, the labourer, the trader, and the artisan should be identical, and the cause of all together should be the cause of Ireland... branches of the Irish National League will be expected to devote themselves to the encouragement of the labour and trade interests as well as the farming interest.¹⁸

Despite this, the new organisation failed initially to develop extensively in Kerry. By January 1883, only four branches existed in the county, located at Brosna, Furies, Ballyduff and Listowel. This was a low participation rate compared to neighbouring counties. Cork and Limerick had fifteen branches each, although Clare was similar with five. Countrywide, 276 branches had been created by February 1883.¹⁹ The branches that were established in Kerry had a similar composition to the previous Land League. In Listowel, the leading members of the new National League were, according to the police,

¹⁶ C.C. O'Brien, 'The machinery of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1880-85' in *I.H.S.*, v, no. 17 (1946), pp 55-85; B.M. Walker, 'The 1885 and 1886 general elections: a milestone in Irish history' in Peter Collins (ed.), *Nationalism and Unionism: conflict in Ireland, 1885-1921* (Belfast, 1994), pp 1-15

¹⁷ The official objectives of the National League can be summarised as: (1) national self government, (2) land-law reform, (3) local self government, (4) extension of the parliamentary and municipal franchises, (5) the development and encouragement of the labour and industrial interest of Ireland, with emphasis on improving the conditions of agricultural labourers; see Moody, *Davitt* p. 543.

¹⁸ *K.S.*, 27 Oct. 1882.

¹⁹ Report on progress of Irish National Land League from 1 Jan.-28 Feb. 83 (N.A.I., Irish Land League and National League Papers (ILLNLP), carton vi: Irish National League proceedings, 1883-84).

all 'prominent Land Leaguers'.²⁰ The new league's secretary, John Stack, and treasurer, Robert Stack, had held the same positions in the town's Land League. Three of the five committee members were also members of the original Land League committee.²¹

Similarly, the Firies branch demonstrated a continuation of membership from the Land League. The newly appointed Special Resident Magistrate (S.R.M.) for Cork and Kerry, Captain Plunkett, identified Edward Harrington, John Kelly, John McMahon, Jeremiah Leahy, Patrick Murphy and Fr O'Connor as the leading members of the branch.²²

Harrington, Kelly and McMahon were prominent Land Leaguers from Tralee town, while Leahy and Fr O'Connor were central to the Land League branch in the Firies region.

Similarly, in the Ballyduff region, Timothy Dowling, long associated with the agitation in the region was a leading member.²³ Unsurprisingly, figures that formed the leadership of the Land League branches were central to the new organisation. These individuals were highly politicised after the recent agitation. They formed a core of political agitators that had emerged as the local leadership of popular politics during the Land War.

Although the branches that were established had the same leading personnel as the Land League, the momentum provided by the economic crisis that had propelled the dramatic emergence of the Land League in the winter of 1880 was not present in the winter of 1882. The agrarian economy had to some degree emerged from the depression which marked the late 1870s and agricultural prices had in general risen.²⁴ The failure of the National League to develop was further compounded by successive government legislation in the form of the 1881 Land Act and 1882 Arrears Act. Specifically, the decisions and reductions offered by the Land Courts of the Land Commission dominated the attention of tenant farmers. Tenant farmers eagerly entered the commission, created

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *K.S.*, 14 Jan. 1881, *K.S.*, 20 Feb. 1883.

²² Report on progress of Irish National League from 1 Apr. - 31 Apr. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP, carton vi). In December 1881 a new grade of police officers was created and six Special Resident Magistrates were appointed. They were responsible for directing and co-ordinating the activities of the forces of law and order in specific groups of counties. In 1883 they were reduced to four and termed Divisional Magistrates; see R.B. McDowell, *The Irish administration, 1801-1914* (London, 1964), p. 142; Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth century Ireland*, p. 142; For an account of the activities of a zealous S.R.M. in the counties Clare and Limerick see, Clifford Lloyd, *Ireland under the Land League: a narrative of personal experiences* (Edinburgh, 1892).

²³ Report on progress of Irish National Land League from 1 Apr.-31 Apr. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP, carton vi).

²⁴ Donnelly, *Land and the people of nineteenth century Cork*, pp 293-5.

under Gladstone's 1881 Land Act, to get rent reductions. During the commission's first statutory year in operation 3,335 applications were made by tenants and landlords to have rents fixed in the county.²⁵ However, the hearings of the vast majority of these applicants were delayed and by August 1882 the commission had only fixed 327 cases.²⁶ It was not until March 1883 that the Commission began to get through the massive backlog of cases. From then until the end of the year the commission fixed a monthly average of one hundred and thirty cases. By the end of December 1883, the commission had set a total of 1,892 new rents for tenant farmers in Kerry.

Table 4.a: Number of rents fixed by the Land Commission in county Kerry, Munster and Ireland, Aug. 1881-Dec. 1883.

	Kerry	Munster	Ireland
Aug.-Dec. 1881	66	304	1,313
Apr. 1882	44	726	2,507
May	55	399	1,955
June	68	340	1,781
July	94	604	2,636
Aug.	0	428	1,754
Sept.-Oct.	89	400	1,958
Nov.	80	400	2,759
Dec.	21	386	1,638
Jan. 1883	40	253	1,632
Feb.	79	235	1,990
Mar.	123	791	3,938
Apr.	175	806	3,259
May	173	659	3,954
June	120	717	3,525
July	195	773	3,655
Aug.	63	652	2,405
Sept.	1	115	823
Oct.	225	517	3,578
Nov.	126	482	3,279
Dec.	87	554	2,918
Total	1,924	10,541	53,257

²⁵ *Irish Land Commission report for the period 22 Aug. 1881 to 22 Aug. 1882*, p.8 [C 3413], H.C. 1882 xx. 265.

²⁶ A number of reasons were cited for this 'block'. The most common was that large numbers of tenants applied to enter the Land Courts immediately because reductions were to be granted from the date of application as opposed to when the case and decision was made. See, *Select committee of House of Lords on land law (Ireland): first report, proceedings, minutes of evidence, appendix, index*, p. 83, H.C. 1882 (249), xi.1; *Irish Land Commission report for the period 22 Aug. 1881 to 22 Aug. 1882*, p.8.

Source: *Return, according to provinces and counties, of judicial rents fixed by sub-commissioners and Civil Bill Courts, as notified to the Irish Land Commission, up to 31 Dec. 1881 (up to 31 Dec. 1884).*

During this period tenant farmers attentively followed the Commission's hearings and subsequent judgements. As early as 1882 a land agent, Simon Little, who attended a number of Land Commission hearings in Kerry, complained to a House of Lords Select Committee established to investigate the workings of the 1881 Land Act, that farmers' energy and time was devoted to gaining rent reductions and the business of the Land Commission. He stated:

it [the Land Act] has disturbed their minds so much that they have all of a sudden found out that their rent is too high, and they come in wholesale clamouring for reduction; and as regards the younger tenants, men from twenty-five to thirty years of age, they have neglected their business terribly; they have all turned legislators;... they go in and spend their day in the towns meeting together.²⁷

The middle to large tenant farmers extensively availed of the reductions granted by the commission. Of the 1,892 rents fixed in Kerry tenants whose farm had a government valuation between the valuations of £10-£50 made up 46.4% of this number, despite representing only 29.6% of the county's total amount of holdings. Tenants in Kerry could on average have expected a 23.5% reduction in rent from the courts.²⁸ For many tenants this was undoubtedly a sizable reduction in rent and represented a profitable return from their support of the Land League. Smaller tenants availed of the act to a more limited extent. Fifty per cent of the total rents fixed by the Land Commission were for farm holdings valued under £10. This was considerably disproportionate to the total number of farms in the county at such a value, which amounted to 67.2%. Furthermore, the reductions these small farmers did receive were often largely undermined by the cost of legal expenses, which reached approximately £3 per case.²⁹ Only 6.2 per cent of all farm holdings under the £10 valuation got rent reductions compared to 13.1 percent in the £10-£50 and eleven per cent in the over fifty pounds bracket. This further illustrates the middle to large farmer preference for the Land Courts. The middle to large farmer group

²⁷ *Select committee of House of Lords on Land Law (Ireland): first report, proceedings, minutes of evidence, appendix, index*, p. 147, H.C. 1882 (249), xi. 1.

²⁸ By December 1883 a total rental of £62,036 was reduced to £48,070 by the Land Commission making a 23.5% reduction.

²⁹ Donnelly, *Land and the people of nineteenth century Cork*, p. 299.

who held land valued at above £10 benefited mostly from the decisions reached by the Land Commission.

Table 4.b: The number of cases fixed by the Land Commission by valuation, the total number of such holdings, and the proportion of such holdings with rents fixed compared to the overall total in county Kerry, Aug. 1881-Dec. 1883.

	Under £10	£10-£50	Over £50
Number and percentage of cases fixed by valuation of the holdings by the Land Commission	946 (50%)	879 (46.4%)	67 (3.5%)
Number and percentage of the total number of holdings in the county	15,225 (67.2%)	6,710 (29.6%)	613 (2.7%)
Proportion of holdings with rent fixed compared to total number of each valuation.	6.2%	13.1%	11%

Source; *Return, according to provinces and counties, of judicial rents fixed by sub-commissioners and Civil Bill Courts, as notified to the Irish Land Commission, up to 31 Dec. 1881 (up to 31 Dec. 1883); Return of agricultural holdings, compiled by the Local Government Board in Ireland from the returns furnished by the clerks of the poor law unions in Ireland 1881*, pp 4-7 [C 2934], H.C. 1881, xcii, 793.

The widespread lowering of rents by the Land Commission signified an unheralded gain by tenants over their landlords. It relived much of the tensions between the two groups. In turn, rural society was greatly stabilised and the commission acted as the 'main agent in the deflation of the land war'.³⁰ The Listowel region, which had been the centre of serious agrarian disorder, and as late as August 1882 had parishes proclaimed by the police as a result of outrages committed there, was by October described as 'peaceful and much improved' by the R.M., Massey. He believed that this was due to 'the contentment to a certain extent of the farming class'.³¹ Similarly within the Killarney region it was reported by the R.M. that tenants' 'attention is at present engaged in taking advantage of the Arrears Bill' and rents were paid in 'some instances for the purpose of taking advantage of' it.³² The National League, with home rule at the forefront of its agenda, failed to compete with the Land Commission in attracting tenants' interest during 1883. The vital group of middle to large sized farmers had little appetite for the National League and such tenants largely concentrated their efforts on gaining rent reductions in the Land Courts.

³⁰ R.V. Comerford, 'Land Commission' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford, 1998), p. 296.

³¹ South Western Division: R.M.s' fortnightly report, 14 Oct. 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 41261)

³² *Ibid.*

The new organisation was further undermined by a general apprehension towards potentially violent agrarian agitation. Although the Land League agitation was undoubtedly associated with intimidation and a high level of outrages, no agrarian murder was committed in the county until 1882 during the violent conclusion of the 'no-rent manifesto'. This bloody period witnessed an increase in serious violence with three murders and a high number of shootings.³³ By October 1882, many tenant farmers were increasingly apprehensive towards any form of agitation. During the month the R.M. for the Killarney region stated: 'the more respectable classes of this district express serious apprehension of an increase of outrage during the coming winter. A number of farmers are in the most abject state of terror'.³⁴ Such hesitancy was also evident in the Ballyduff region. The leading figures of the newly formed National League were widely suspected of being heavily involved in violent secret societies in the region. Significantly, two of its principal members had been arrested under the Protection of Persons and Property Act. The police contended that as a result of the branch's radicalism, the farmers in the region failed to join it and by February 1883 the police authorities believed the branch had collapsed.³⁵ Condemnation of the violence of the agitation appeared to be widespread. In March 1882 the Land League mouthpiece, the *Sentinel*, condemned Captain Moonlight as 'barbaric' and claimed that agrarian violence exhausted the 'resources of human civilisation'.³⁶ During June the Roman Catholic bishop of Kerry, Higgins, while speaking in the heavily disturbed district of Castleisland after a recent murder, declared:

[I] was in Dublin during the past week and in many places I saw to my regret, placarded 'horrible murder near Tralee', 'horrible murder in Kerry'. Why I was ashamed as a Kerryman, and not alone as a Kerryman, but as bishop of the diocese.³⁷

Further popular condemnation of violence emerged after the Phoenix Park murders when a number of 'indignation meetings' were held across the county to protest against the

³³ Returns of outrages, 1882 (N.A.I., CSO ICR, Returns of outrages, 1879-93 (printed stats-annual) vol. 2). For a full analysis of agrarian violence during this period see ch. VI.

³⁴ South Western Division: R.M.s' fortnightly report ending 31 Oct. 1881 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 42882).

³⁵ Report on progress of Irish National Land League from 1 Jan.-28 Feb. 83 (N.A.I., ILLNLP, carton vi: Irish National League proceedings, 1883-84).

³⁶ *K.S.*, 21 Mar. 1882.

³⁷ *K.I.*, 3 July 1882.

deaths.³⁸ A certain weariness of the violent outrages that featured during the recent agitation was apparent by the end of 1882. Such violence had alienated many of the middle to large tenant farmers who previously supported the Land League from the agitation. Although Parnell successfully sidelined radical agrarianism in the National League leadership, tenant farmers were not willing to engage in any political activity that may have led to the re-emergence of extremism that had marked the 'no rent manifesto'.³⁹ Apprehensions over the implications of agrarian violence were further compounded with the introduction of the 'police tax'. Under the provisions of government legislation stretching back to the 1870 Peace and Preservation Act extra police could be placed in disturbed parishes whose cost was met by the ratepayers of the region in what was known as the 'police tax'. This measure was reintroduced under the Crimes Act of 1882.⁴⁰ In July the S.R.M. for the south-west, Captain Plunkett, issued a statement warning that if outrages did not discontinue in the violent districts he would send extra police to these areas.⁴¹ Over the following months Plunkett carried out his threat. By September 1882 twelve parishes in the county were paying for seventy extra police at a total cost of £557.⁴² In turn, fear of the police tax undermined the popularity of the new league. In February 1883 a body of leaguers led by Edward Harrington and John Kelly went to the chairman of the Tralee Town Commissions, John Hayes, to ask him to convene a meeting of the National League.⁴³ Hayes, although never a fully fledged active member of the Land League, had led a fund to pay for Parnell's legal defence in November 1880.⁴⁴ He had also acted as a surety for bail for Timothy Harrington after he was arrested in Tralee in January 1881.⁴⁵ He refused the request stating that the establishment of the league in Tralee could lead to the emergence of outrage and the subsequent introduction of the police tax in the vicinity.⁴⁶ Although the National League was established as a constitutional and parliamentary organisation, apprehension that the

³⁸ *K.I.*, 11 May 1882; the Tralee Chamber of Commerce and Killarney Town Commissions met to denounce the assassinations.

³⁹ For a full analysis of the 'no rent manifesto' in county Kerry see ch. VI.

⁴⁰ Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth century Ireland*, p. 142.

⁴¹ South Western Division, R.M.s' fortnightly report ending 16 July 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 34011).

⁴² *K.E.P.*, 25 Nov. 1882.

⁴³ *K.E.P.*, 3 Feb. 1883.

⁴⁴ *K.S.*, 9 Nov. 1880.

⁴⁵ *T.C.*, 11 Feb. 1881.

new movement would precipitate a renewed violent agitation greatly undermined its progress. Despite the constitutionalist policy of Parnell and rightward shift of the league at a national level, by 1883 in county Kerry the movement was associated with violent radicalism by many. In stark contrast to the emergence of the Land League, it failed to harness large-scale public support.

The National League was further undermined coercive powers of the 1882 Crimes Act. A public meeting of the National League, announced to be held in Causeway in early 1883, was suppressed under the act. When organisers attempted to hold the meeting it was dispersed by police and led to fifteen prosecutions.⁴⁷ Police officials regularly cited the Crimes Act as the central reason for the stabilising of the county from agitation.⁴⁸ The powers of the Crimes Act were enforced when the printing press of the *Kerry Sentinel* was seized and its editor, Edward Harrington, was arrested and subsequently imprisoned for six months. A notice had appeared on a number of walls in Tralee town purporting to be from the Invincibles. The notices referred to the 'bloody English Government' and called for 'death to landlords, agents, and bailiffs'.⁴⁹ It transpired that they were printed on the printing press in the offices of the *Sentinel*. During the trial, which was held under the Crimes Act, Harrington realistically claimed that two young 'headless' apprentices that were working in the offices printed them. Notwithstanding this defence, Harrington received a six month sentence depriving the league of its leading figure in Kerry.⁵⁰ The coercive legislation of the Crimes Act undermined the emergence of the National League throughout 1882-84.

As farmers largely avoided the new league, agricultural labourers emerged as a significant group within the movement at a local level. The labourers' question had been formally adopted by the Land League at the September 1881 convention. Following this,

⁴⁶ *K.E.P.*, 3 Feb. 1883.

⁴⁷ *K.S.*, 9 Jan. 1882 and *K.S.*, 29 Jan. 1882.

⁴⁸ For example see, South Western Division: R.M.s' fortnightly reports ending 31 Oct. 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1882 42882).

⁴⁹ *K.S.*, 22 May 1883.

⁵⁰ In a follow up search on the offices of the *Kerry Sentinel* letters dating from the height of the Land League agitation were found asking for threatening notices to be printed for rent strikes. Harrington retorted by stating that he received letters like these all the time but didn't act on them, see N.A.I., CSO, Protection of Person and Property Act, 1881, carton vi. In this carton are documents relating to the prosecution of newspapers under the aforementioned Act.

many meetings became known as 'Land and Labour' meetings.⁵¹ In turn, labour issues became more prominent at local branch meetings of the Land League. A number of resolutions were passed by branches in the county demanding that farmers give a half acre (con-acre) to their labourers at the same rent that they paid their landlord.⁵² After the suppression of the Land League, a Labour League emerged in 1882. In Munster alone over 200 branches existed.⁵³ Labour League activity was evident in Kerry at Ballyduff, Brosna and Knocknagoshel.⁵⁴ Despite the name of the organisation the police believed that it was merely a continuation of the Land League. Plunkett stated the Labour League was

simply the Land League over again. They are not organised for the purpose of benefiting the labourers but for the purpose of holding public meetings with a view of forming branches in every place to carry on the work of the [Land] League and to promulgate the same doctrines as before.⁵⁵

An attempt to centralise these Labour Leagues under a Dublin authority was made in August 1882 when the Irish Labour and Industrial Union was established. However, the executive was clearly made up of ex-Land Leaguers with little or no track record of promoting labourers rights and when the National League was established the labour organisation was 'merged' with the new movement.⁵⁶ As Padraig Lane demonstrates:

when a Central Labour League Executive appeared it was dominated by Parnell and so that when a National Labour League was formally established that month [August 1882] it was so obviously a subterfuge for the old Land League that when the National League was formed somewhat later it absorbed it.⁵⁷

Although the National League easily overtook the short-lived Labour League, labourers did appear to be somewhat mobilised during the period. While farmers could look at the benefits of the Land Act as a return on their participation in the agitation of the Land League, labourers had achieved little. This discontentment was recognised by

⁵¹ For two examples see meeting at Currow *K.S.*, 13 Sept. 1881, and meeting at Fenit *K.S.*, 27 Sept. 1881

⁵² See Ardfert Land League, *K.S.*, 11 Oct. 1881. Farmers were frequently accused of charging labourers con-acre rents at highly inflated prices.

⁵³ Padraig Lane, 'Agricultural labourers in Ireland, 1850-1914' (unpublished PhD thesis, University College Cork, 1980), pp 84-90.

⁵⁴ *K.S.*, 9 May 1882, 15 Sep 1882 and 20 Oct. 1882.

⁵⁵ South Western Division: R.M.s' fortnightly report ending 31 Aug. 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 37029)

⁵⁶ Fintan Lane, 'Rural labourers, social change and politics in later nineteenth century Ireland' in Fintan Lane and Donal O'Drisceoil, *Politics and the Irish working class, 1830-1945* (Hampshire, 2005), p. 133.

the advocates of the National League within the county. Agricultural labourers and their cause featured prominently at initial National League meetings. At the first Ballyduff National League meeting, the Tralee Leaguer and ex-Fenian, John Kelly, announced that 'the labourer interest will be looked to with greater care than it has been before'.⁵⁸ During the establishment of the largely urban Listowel National League, the labourers cause was championed. Under the chairmanship of Canon Davis the programme for the Listowel League was; firstly Home Rule; secondly extension of municipal franchise; and thirdly, that farmers with over twenty-five acres give con-acre plots to labourers at the same rent as they paid.⁵⁹ These objectives contradicted the formal National League constitution, which set the land question before both the extension of the municipal franchise and the labourers' question. The pro-labourer stance of the Listowel League was further evident when a labourer named James Guerin stated during a meeting:

the farmers alone had benefited by recent land legislation regarding land tenure and the labourers had contributed more than any other class to the success of the late land agitation, yet they had reaped no advantage from them... if they [farmers] refuse this [give con acre] the labourers as a body will never assist or sympathise with any movement.⁶⁰

Editorial comment in the *Kerry Sentinel* echoed the pro-labourer stance of National League branches. When the National League was established in October 1882, the newspaper claimed that 'the needs of the farmer, once the theme of urgent agitation, pall before the crying necessities of the agricultural labourer'.⁶¹ A month later the newspaper called on farmers to borrow money under the security obtained from the Land Act to make improvements on their farms, which would in turn provide employment for labourers.⁶² Undoubtedly, a feeling amongst some National Leaguers that farmers had benefited from the 1881 Land Act and that it was their duty to provide for the agricultural labourer existed. Although labourer involvement in local leadership of branches remained minimal, they had the largest motive to mobilise and join the new league. In contrast, the position of farmers had somewhat improved and the limitations of the Land Act had yet to

⁵⁷ Pdraig Lane, 'Agricultural labourers in Ireland', p. 85.

⁵⁸ *K.S.*, 19 Dec. 1882.

⁵⁹ *K.S.*, 20 Feb. 1883.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *K.S.*, 13 Oct. 1882.

⁶² *K.S.*, 10 Nov. 1882.

become fully apparent. Possibly the leaguers were consolidating the support of the agricultural labourers in the knowledge that the farming community was not going to offer the movement substantial support. However, the demands for con-acre plots, better housing and more labourer employment were financially detrimental to farmers and further distanced that class from the league.

In December 1883 the Divisional Magistrate for south-west, Captain Plunkett, confidently stated that 'in county Kerry the league is a dead failure, not a single branch exists'.⁶³ The Nationalist appeal for home rule failed to galvanise mass support to anything near the level that the Land League succeeded. Although many of the local leading figures from the Land League remained active in the county and were committed to establishing the new organisation, they largely failed during 1882-3. An unwillingness of many tenants to commit to what they saw as a renewed agitation, the coercive effects of the Crimes Act and farmer-labourer divisions all undermined the emergence of the National League. More importantly, the recent land legislation appealed to many of the middle and large farmers that had previously supported the Land League in the county. With the Land Courts reducing rents on an average of twenty-three per cent, many of these farmers were willing to forgo political and agrarian agitation to avail of the benefits of the new legislation. The league's failure demonstrated the weakness of home rule at a local level. The realities of rent reductions and further taxation were far more influential factors over motivations for political agitation than the broad Nationalist demand for home rule during 1882-83 in county Kerry.

Despite the lack of any coherent Nationalist organisation in the county, elements that characterised the Land League agitation still prevailed. The electoral success on boards of guardians of Land Leaguers continued. In the 1883 poor law election to the Tralee Board of Guardians thirty-five of the forty-two elected guardians were returned on what the police believed to be a 'Land League ticket'.⁶⁴ The result ensured the successful removal of the *ex-officio* guardians from the controlling positions of the board. Michael McMahon and P.D. Kenny were elected to the positions of chairman and vice-

⁶³ Report on the progress of the Irish National League 1 Oct. to 31 Dec. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP, carton vi). Structural changes in the police administration of the country led to disbandment of the positions of Special Resident Magistrates and the creation of the Divisional Magistrates.

⁶⁴ R.M.s' reports regarding recent poor law elections, Apr. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 2289).

chairman.⁶⁵ McMahon was a founding member of the Land League in Tralee and Kenny was previously president of the Castleisland branch of the league and was imprisoned under the P.P.P. Act.⁶⁶ Although the infrastructure of league branches was removed, individuals previously associated with the movement were capable of gaining success at local elections.

Another central feature of the Land League agitation was the prevention of the retaking of evicted farms by new tenants (popularly known as land grabbing). By the end of 1883 this policy was still largely adhered to within rural society. As table 4.c demonstrates, over half of the tenants evicted between January 1881 and October 1883 were reinstated in their original holdings. Of the 270 remaining holdings only sixty-nine were successfully rented to new tenants. 120 were farmed by landlords while a further eight-one remained unoccupied and uncultivated. Despite the lack of open tenant organisation, the Land League objective of preventing the re-taking of evicted farms remained largely adhered to. In the police district of Castleisland alone thirty farms remained unoccupied. Twenty-eight of these were within the sub-district of Castleisland, an area which only comprised of the town and its immediate hinterland. This region had developed into one of the most disturbed in the country. Despite the apparent quenching of agrarian tensions in the county, this region remained embroiled in agitation albeit it seemed to reach a standstill by late 1883. The police believed that

the tenants are holding out without redeeming knowing that the longer they [unoccupied farms] are useless to the landlords the easier it will be to come to terms with them. No outsider would take these farms as if he did, unless constantly guarded by police, he would unquestionably be assassinated.⁶⁷

Within the Castleisland area secret societies remained in existence during 1883. Other areas including Tralee and Listowel also experienced agrarian secret society activity. The large number of evicted farms that remained unoccupied or in the hands of the landlord demonstrated the existence of a systematic organisation in place since the Land League, which prevented land grabbing. Two significant factors of the Land League remained within localities after its disintegration and preceding overall failure of the National

⁶⁵ *K.S.*, 27 Mar. 1883.

⁶⁶ For McMahon see *K.S.*, 27 Sept. 1880 and for Kenny see *K.S.*, 19 Nov. 1880.

League. The middle class farmers and townsmen who came to prominence during the Land War continued with their social aspirations of achieving increased local power and influence over local government bodies. Furthermore, the violence, or at the least the threat of violence that surrounded the Land League agitation, remained a constant force within certain rural localities. The continuance of these two elements demonstrated that despite the general apathy towards the National League and home rule, much of the motivations for local political and agrarian action remained in place in 1882-83.

Table 4.c: Return of farms in each police district in county Kerry from which tenants have been evicted or which have been surrendered from 1 Jan. 1881-1 Oct. 1883.

	Evicted farms	Occupied by old tenants	Occupied by new tenants	In hands of landlords	Unoccupied and not farmed
Kerry	624	354	69	120	81
Caherciveen	22	16	7	0	1
Castleisland	80	38	3	9	30
Dingle	58	52	2	2	2
Kenmare	17	8	7	0	2
Killarney	126	83	8	21	14
Killorglin	121	88	7	10	16
Listowel	113	32	29	43	12
Tralee	87	37	6	35	4

Source: Return of farms in county Kerry from which tenants have been evicted or which have been surrendered from 1 Jan. 1881-1 Oct. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1883 23534/9127).

By the start of 1884 the National League remained largely unsuccessful in the county. In January Edward Harrington was released after his six month imprisonment. A demonstration was held in Tralee to mark his release. T.D. Sullivan and Timothy Harrington, both M.P.s who were central figures within the leadership of the National League, addressed the meeting.⁶⁸ Despite the national prominence of the speakers,

⁶⁷ Return of farms in county Kerry from which tenants have been evicted or which have been surrendered from 1 Jan. 1881 to 1 Oct. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1883 23534/9127).

⁶⁸ *K.S.*, 8 Jan. 1884. Timothy Harrington had cemented his elevated position at the forefront of the movement when elected as M.P. for Westmeath in the 1883 by-election. T.D. Sullivan was editor of the *Nation* and was a central figure in the National League. Both Sullivan and Harrington were closely connected with a number of other M.P.s centred around Sullivan and T.M. Healy. This group, which later included Edward Harrington were known as the 'Bantry Band' owing to their political ambitions and that they were all from west Cork. The Harrington's were from Berehaven as opposed to Bantry. The ten members of the Irish Party in the group were T.M. Healy, Maurice Healy, Thomas J Healy, A.M. Sullivan, T.D. Sullivan, Donal Sullivan, Timothy Harrington, Edward Harrington, William Martin Murphy, and James Gilhooly; see Frank Callanan, *The Parnell split, 1890-91* (Cork, 1992), p. 236.

coupled with Harrington's release, the demonstration was poorly attended. The R.I.C. reporter who observed the meeting commented that 'the assemblage was composed of the working men, labourers and tradesmen of that town and neighbourhood. Very few farmers and with one or two exceptions none of the respectable shopkeepers attended'.⁶⁹ The R.M. for Tralee, Considine commented that 'the meeting was a miserable affair... it has shown what little sympathy existed for Mr Harrington'.⁷⁰ Such apathy was further highlighted when an attempt to establish a branch in Dingle during March failed due to a lack of support from the farmers in the area.⁷¹ In further signs of the normalisation of society, the disturbed regions of the county demonstrated signs of improvement in the eyes of the police. By February 1884, Plunkett removed the extra police stationed in the Killarney and Molahiffe parishes. For the previous eighteen months the ratepayers of these parishes had to pay for the extra police.⁷² Similarly, during March 1884 the 'police tax' was suspended in Castleisland.⁷³ The removal of the police tax in these regions was a result of a reduction in the number of agrarian outrages committed. For the years 1880 and 1882 inclusively, the number of agrarian outrages reported to the R.I.C. was 298, 401 and 347 respectively.⁷⁴ By 1883 this number had reduced to 146 and 1884 witnessed 117 agrarian outrages.⁷⁵ Rents were reportedly paid and landlord-tenant relations were improving to some extent. The number of civil bills issued for ejectment, a legal procedure used by landlords to force rent payment, reached its lowest number since 1880, albeit it remained well above the pre land war norm (in 1879 594 were issued, in 1882

⁶⁹ Report on the release of Edward Harrington, 6 Jan. 1884 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1884 741).

⁷⁰ South Western Division: R.M.s' fortnightly report, 3. Feb. 1884 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1884 3333).

⁷¹ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly police report, Mar. 1884 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1884 8788).

⁷² *K.S.*, 15 Feb. 1884.

⁷³ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly police report, Mar. 1884 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1884 8788).

⁷⁴ *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the constabulary office, 1880*, p. 3, H.C. 1881 (12), lxxvii. 619; *Return of number of agrarian offences in each county in Ireland reported to the constabulary office, 1881*, p. 3, H.C. 1882 (8), lv.1; *Return, by provinces, of agrarian offences throughout Ireland reported to Inspector General of Royal Irish Constabulary, 1882*, pp 8-9, H.C. 1883 (12) lvi.1.

⁷⁵ *Return, by provinces, of agrarian offences throughout Ireland reported to Inspector General of Royal Irish Constabulary, 1883*, pp 8-9 [C 3950], H.C. 1884, lxiv.1; *Return, by provinces, of agrarian Offences throughout Ireland reported to Inspector General of Royal Irish Constabulary, 1884*, pp 8-9 [C 4500], H.C. 1884-5, lxiv.1

1,676 and in 1884 1,131).⁷⁶ By the middle of 1884 the county appeared to be somewhat stabilising if not fully returning to the quiescence of former days.

4.3: Growth of the league on a 'national' level.

Despite the apparent tranquillity of the Kerry and Irish countryside, the National League began to emerge to some degree in the country during 1884. The number of branches grew countrywide from 230 in December 1882 to 592 in December 1884. Unlike the initial emergence of the Land League, the National League was at its strongest in the prosperous regions of Munster and Leinster. By the start of 1885 Limerick and Tipperary were the most prominent National League counties in Munster, with sixty and forty-nine branches respectively. The league was also prominent in the south-east of the country. Thirty-three branches existed in Waterford with thirty in Kilkenny.⁷⁷ These regions were relatively prosperous and were traditionally less violent than the western seaboard. In these areas the increasingly Catholic National League could rely on the support of the middling farmers and shopkeepers who were also loyal sons of the church.⁷⁸ Many of these branches provided the parliamentary party with the local strength to successfully return M.P.s loyal to the party during 1883-84. During this period twelve M.P.s were added to the Parnellite party in by-election successes.⁷⁹ Central to the success of these elections were the county conventions of the local branches of the league. In December 1884 the Chief Secretary was informed:

the county conventions that were summoned at Limerick, Roscommon, Dungarvan and Dublin [were] to exhibit the ready manner in which questions affecting the welfare of the league can be discussed and effectively dealt with and the fact of Mr Power being returned unopposed for county Waterford and recently Mr O'Connor for county Tipperary is sufficient proof of its hold on the votes of the majority.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *Returns showing, for the counties of Clare, Cork, Kerry, Galway, and Mayo respectively, the number of civil bills entered at quarter sessions in ejectment on title for non-payment of rent, or overholding in the years from 1879 to 1888 inclusive*, p. 5, H.C. 1889 (211), lxi, 417.

⁷⁷ Report on progress of Irish National League from 1 July to 31 Dec 1884 (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP, carton vi; Irish National League proceedings, 1883-84).

⁷⁸ Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998*, p. 125; Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish nationalist politics*, (Dublin, 1981), p. 78.

⁷⁹ B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 128-29.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* The Dungarvan convention decided to pay Mr Power £200 a year for his position as MP. The money was to be levied on the county branches.

While these conventions impressed the authorities with their organisational strength their real value was in effectively providing Parnell and the parliamentary party with hegemony over the selection of candidates. It was a system that 'combined the appearance of local spontaneity with the reality of centralised control'.⁸¹ Other initiatives further strengthened the power and unity of the party. The creation of a party fund to pay elected M.P.s and the necessity of candidates to take a pledge to the party and vote with it in the House of Commons ensured the return of M.P.s for 'whom loyalty to the party was a *sine qua non*'.⁸² Parnell and the National League's grip on Nationalist politics was further strengthened when in October 1884 the Irish Catholic bishops aligned themselves to the movement and formally entrusting the Irish parliamentary party to press for their educational demands in the House of Commons.⁸³ The under-secretary in Dublin Castle commented that the move 'identifies the bishops and priests of Ireland with the people'.⁸⁴ Along with increased clerical involvement in the new league, serious agrarian crime failed to emerge. In December 1884 the Chief Secretary was informed that 'it ought in fairness be stated that outrages have not followed the National League as they did the Land League'.⁸⁵ These developments have led some historians to describe the National League as a 'smooth running national electioneering machinery that had hitherto been lacking to the parliamentary party'.⁸⁶ Others have ventured that the Irish parliamentary party and its localised under body, the National League was 'among the most remarkable political movements established in a primarily rural European society'.⁸⁷

Although the National League did achieve a degree of success by the start of 1885, it still wasn't apparent that it would develop into a large-scale mass movement. Areas of traditional Land League activity witnessed little National League organisation. In Mayo only seven branches were established. The Chief Secretary's Office commented

⁸¹ Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish Nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 81.

⁸² R.V. Comerford, 'The Parnell era, 1883-91' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.) *A new history of Ireland, VI Ireland under the Union, II 1879-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 54.

⁸³ For a detailed analysis of the high politics of Catholic Church and its evolving relationship with the forces of Nationalism during the period see, Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic church and the creation of the modern Irish state, 1878-86* (Philadelphia, 1975).

⁸⁴ Report on progress of Irish National League from 1 July to 31 Dec. 1884 (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP, carton vi, Irish National League proceedings, 1883-84).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ C.C. O'Brien, *Parnell and his party* (Oxford, 1957), p. 128.

⁸⁷ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 106.

that 'in Mayo the league has fallen quite flat, rather astonishing considering that this county was the birth place of the Land League'.⁸⁸ By 1885 many leading Nationalists still had serious doubts whether the demand for home rule could mobilise large sections of the population.⁸⁹ Michael Davitt along with the Galway agrarian, Matthew Harris, and Jasper Tully, editor of one of the most radical journals in Ireland, the *Roscommon Herald*, all believed that for tenant farmers, home rule paled in significance and importance to the land question.⁹⁰ Even where branches had been established in regions in the country a degree of apathy was apparent and meetings were at times poorly attended.⁹¹ Although the National League had made significant progress by increasing branch numbers, holding of county conventions and ensuring the successful return of M.P.s at by-elections, it had yet to develop into a mass movement similar to the Land League.

4.4 Local politics in Kerry, 1885

Despite the apathy previously shown to the league in Kerry, it did begin to make some progress in the county by the start of 1885. A number of league demonstrations were successfully held leading to the establishment of local branches. By February a branch was finally established in Tralee. However, the politics of home rule and Parnellism were not widely apparent within the county. A number of local initiatives, which transcended the Nationalist and Unionist and largely Catholic and Protestant divisions of home rule politics, appeared to develop out of the political vacuum created since the end of the Land League. In Tralee town a movement centred on lowering local taxation emerged in the first number of months of 1885. Local government expenditure had soared since the emergence of the land agitation. Between 1877 and 1884 the annual expenditure of the county's six boards of guardians and grand jury rose from £64,324 to £109,862. Board of guardian expenditure experienced the greatest increase. Land League

⁸⁸ Report on progress of Irish National League from 1 July to 31 Dec 1884 (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP, carton vi, Irish National League proceedings, 1883-84).

⁸⁹ James Loughlin, 'Constructing the political spectacle: Parnell, the press and national leadership, 1879-86' in D.G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Parnell in perspective* (London, 1991), p. 231.

⁹⁰ James Loughlin, *Gladstone, home rule and the Ulster question* (Dublin, 1986), pp 27-8; During July 1885 Harris highlighted continued class tensions with tenant society when he publicly declared that graziers were the 'enemies' of the peasantry, see *U.I.*, 11 July 1885.

⁹¹ For an example of local apathy towards National League meetings during September 1884 in county Westmeath, see, A.C. Murray, 'Nationality and local politics in late nineteenth century Ireland: the case of County Westmeath' in *I.H.S.*, xxv, no. 98 (Nov., 1986), p. 146.

guardians freely gave out-door relief to evicted tenants, families of those arrested in the agitation and members of the league.⁹² The grand jury, firmly under the control of the landed interest, also witnessed an increase in annual expenditure from £42,434 in 1877 to £55,891 in 1884. This increase was also directly related to the land agitation. In 1880 none of the grand jury expenditure went on extra police in the county. By 1884 extra police cost the grand jury system £6,669 in Kerry.⁹³ The majority of this police force was employed protecting landlord employees and landlords themselves and was considered unnecessary by many.

Table 4.d: Poor law union and grand jury expenditure in county Kerry, 1877-1884.

Year	P.L.U.	Grand Jury	Total
1877	£21,890	£42,434	£64,324
1878	£24,609	£41,509	£66,118
1879	£26,701	£44,708	£71,409
1880	£30,079	£43,438	£73,517
1881	£34,430	£47,227	£81,657
1882	£37,454	£50,453	£87,907
1883	£53,225	£58,255	£111,480
1884	£53,971	£55,891	£109,862

Source: *K.E.P.*, 28 Feb. 1885.

The land agitation had extensively driven up the cost of local government in the county. This cost was paid by the ratepayers who consisted of landlords and the occupiers of land with a valuation above £4.⁹⁴ Attempts were made to establish common ground between these groups of ratepayers. In a letter published in the county's three newspapers Redmond Roche J.P., a small landlord (1,255 acres) from Castleisland, highlighted the commonality of interests between landlords and tenants when he wrote:

⁹² Expenditure on relief differed greatly from boards controlled by pro league elected guardians and landlord *ex-officio* guardians. For example, the Dingle Board of Guardians, under the control of the parsimonious Lord Ventry, spent a mere £9 on out-door relief in 1877 which rose to £13 in 1884. In stark contrast, the Tralee Board's expenditure on relief soared from £30 to £2,534 after league guardians gained control during the corresponding period. For more on poor law expenditure in Kerry during the period, see the evidence given by the L.G.B. inspector for Kerry, Colonel Spraight, to a House of Lords Select Committee, *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Poor Law Guardians (Ireland) Bill; with the proceedings, evidence, and index*, pp 68-74, H.C. 1884-5 (297), x, 281.

⁹³ *Return of local taxation in Ireland for 1880*; p. 13 [C 3097], H.C. 1881, lxxix, 125 and *Return of local taxation in Ireland, for 1884*, p. 13 [C 4544], H.C. 1884-5, lxvii, 429.

⁹⁴ Virginia Crossman, *Local government in nineteenth century Ireland* (Belfast, 1994), p. 41.

a large proportion of this [rates] comes out of the rents of the landlord, a larger portion still out of the profits of the farmer and trader, and it is clearly the interest of all, as I submit it is their duty, to do what in them lies to lighten the burden.⁹⁵

The high rates were particularly taxing tenant farmers. An unnamed farmer stated to the Cowper Commission that in 1885 he had to pay £17 on poor law rates on a farm of fifty acres. This was a large extra payout on his holding, which had an annual rent of £64.⁹⁶ In March 1885, the R.I.C. District Inspector for Castleisland, Davis, observed that high taxes were a contributory factor to the poverty of tenants in the district. He warned:

taxes are very high and the prices of all sorts of farm produce are low.... I fear that if arrangements don't come between landlords and tenants as well as between the latter and their other creditors that there must be a crash among the farmers in this neighbourhood as between rents, taxes, and improvidence most of the farmers around here are on the verge of bankruptcy.⁹⁷

Evidently local taxation was a significant issue which affected the interest of all classes. In turn, a ratepayers meeting was held in Tralee in early March. Although no landlords were present the meeting was attended by a mixture of Nationalists and a number of prominent Protestant Tralee businessmen, who had largely remained outside the arena of local politics throughout the previous number of turbulent years. Prominent Nationalists, including Edward Harrington, Michael Power and M.J. Nolan attended.⁹⁸ Similarly, William Hill, a leather merchant, Benjamin Piper, a shipping agent and Robert McGowan a leading Tralee merchant, all of whom were Protestants, were also present.⁹⁹ These represented middle class Protestants, whose traditional political allegiance in the town lay largely with liberalism. The borough constituency remained a liberal stronghold and no conservative had been elected since 1837.¹⁰⁰ Many Protestants willingly contributed to the home rule movement of the early 1870s to the extent that 'under Isaac Butt,

⁹⁵ *Land owners in Ireland, 1876* (Baltimore, 1988), p. 144; *K.E.P.*, 28 Feb. 1885.

⁹⁶ *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 1885: Minutes of evidence, and appendix*, p. 540, H.C. 1887, xxvi, 25. (Hereafter *Cowper commission; Evidence*).

⁹⁷ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly report, Mar. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1885 7273).

⁹⁸ These three were all founding members of the National League in the town. They had all been imprisoned as a result of their involvement in the recent agitation.

⁹⁹ All these individuals regularly attended meetings in the town's Protestant Hall, see *K.W.R.*, 25 Apr. 1885.

¹⁰⁰ The conservative candidate, John Bateman, was unseated on petition soon after his election and replaced by a Liberal- Repeal candidate named Maurice O'Connell, see Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922*, p. 315.

Protestants had been largely responsible for instigating the movement in 1873'.¹⁰¹ This was evident in Tralee when in 1874 a number of prominent Protestant businessmen signed an election petition supporting the home rule candidate for the borough constituency.¹⁰² The exclusion of these middle class Protestants from the landed aristocracy and society pushed this group towards home rule during the 1870s. Although they shared the same religion as the majority of the ruling class they had little if any power. The magistracy remained completely dominated by landlords. Of the 118 Justices of the Peace in the county in 1884 eighty-six were Protestants and thirty-two were Catholics. The gentry's dominance of this group was highlighted in the fact that 106 of the total magistrates were landlords, landlords' sons or land agents. The urban middle class Protestants along with such Catholics were completely omitted from this source of power and influence.¹⁰³ With the advent of the land war, gentry home rulers such as Rowland Blennerhassett, M.P., became alienated from the agitation and failed to support the Land League. However, many middle class Protestants, and particularly, shopkeepers, did offer some support to the Land League. Out of an analysis undertaken by William Feingold of twenty-four Protestants who were entitled to vote during the 1881 Poor Law election in Tralee, eleven didn't vote, three remained neutral, three voted for the conservative candidates while the remaining seven voted for Land League nominees.¹⁰⁴ Despite apparent Protestant middle class support for the Land League (much of this was most probably based on the economic ties between Protestant shopkeepers and tenants), they failed to become involved in the local leadership of the movement. By 1885 such Protestants felt isolated from the increasingly pro-Catholic stance of the new Nationalist

¹⁰¹ James Loughlin, 'Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and Nationalist politics, 1886-93' in *I.H.S.* 25 (1985), p. 341.

¹⁰² Such names included Richard Latchford, a leading Protestant miller in Tralee. Latchford attended meetings at the Protestant Hall in Tralee. Other names that appeared in the petition that were most probably Protestant include William Myles, a grocer and vintner and John Ruttle, a baker. See, Chp. 1, *T.C.*, 4 Feb. 1874, *Guy's Munster Directory 1886* (Cork, 1886), p. 882.

¹⁰³ The occupations of the other J.P.s were; two medical doctors, two military officers, three gentlemen farmers, two barrister/ solicitor and one merchant, see *Return for each county, city, and borough in Ireland, of the names of persons holding the Commission of the Peace, with date of appointment and designation at time of appointment; and number that are Protestants, Roman Catholics, and of other religious persuasions*, pp 44-6, H.C. 1884 (13), lxiii. 331.

¹⁰⁴ With the lack of census material, Feingold, using local knowledge, identified the religious affiliation of 120 voters of which 24 were Protestant. These were all either shopkeepers or farmers. Of those that voted for the Leaguers, six were shopkeepers and one was a farmer, see Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry*, p. 135.

movement. Parnell's alliance with the Catholic Church was becoming more apparent at a local level. This was most evident at the county conventions where the Catholic clergy had a large and disproportional influence.¹⁰⁵

The meeting of the ratepayers was reportedly a success. Although the Unionist *Kerry Evening Post* chastised the 'blustering oratory of clap trap Nationalists' heard during the meeting, a body entitled the Tralee Ratepayers Protective Association was established, which was committed to preventing any further increase in local taxation.¹⁰⁶ With William Hill, as president and Maurice Kelliher, as vice-president, the organisation was representative of middle class Protestant and Catholic traders.¹⁰⁷ The emergence of the ratepayers association illustrated the political appetite of middle class Protestants who were marginalised from the landed ascendancy. Many of these had previously supported the Land League but the increasingly Catholic emphasis of the National League isolated them from the organisation. More significant for the National League, was the fact that its leading members willingly associated themselves with an initiative outside the parameters of the movement. This demonstrated the lack of significance of home rule in the *Realpolitik* of local life.

The preponderance of localised issues over the broad Nationalist home rule agenda was also apparent when a move to create a butter factory was initiated in Tralee. In February 1885 a public meeting was held in Tralee for this purpose, which was organised by some of the county's leading landlords. The meeting was chaired by Lord Ventry and Colonel Crosbie was in attendance. A committee was established that consisted of other gentry figures such as F. R. Bateman, J.P., Redmond Roche, J.P., and J.W. Leahy J.P., and G.T. Trench.¹⁰⁸ A number of gentlemen farmers long associated with agrarian issues were also present. Jonathan Walpole, founding member of the Kerry Tenants Defence Association in 1875 and a constant figure throughout the period,

¹⁰⁵ For further analysis of Protestant alienation from the parliamentary party and the National League during this period, see; Loughlin, 'The Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and Nationalist politics 1886-90', pp 341-63.

¹⁰⁶ *K.E.P.*, 11 Mar. 1885.

¹⁰⁷ *K.E.P.*, 1 Apr. 1885. Maurice Kelliher was designated as a flour dealer in *Guy's*, see *Guy's Munster Directory 1886*, p. 883.

¹⁰⁸ Crosbie owned 13,422 acres near Ballyheigue, Lord Ventry had 93,629 acres mostly on the Dingle peninsula, Bateman had 1,259 acres centred in Tralee, Roche owned 1,255 acres in Castleisland, while John White Leahy's estate consisted of 5,511 acres in the Killarney region, see *Land owners in Ireland, 1876*, pp 141-45.

attended.¹⁰⁹ Other large farmers who were associated with the tenant-right movement of the late 1870s, which were on the committee for the butter factory movement included Michael Whelan, Banemore.¹¹⁰ Whelan and Walpole failed to become radicalised by the Land League and didn't gain any prominence during the land agitation. Other figures present included Robert McGowan, and Stephen Huggard, who as the Clerk of the Crown and Peace was the leading civil servant in the county. Significantly the most prominent National League figure in the county, Edward Harrington, was also present. Many of these figures, who represented the political, social and economic elite of the region, were undoubtedly Unionist in outlook. However, the objective of the meeting was apolitical. The non-partisan nature of the largely Unionist gathering was in evidence when Edward Harrington was offered the position as the groups leading spokesman by Lord Ventry.¹¹¹ The coming together of these groups represented a degree of social *détente* amongst landlords and certain Nationalist figures in Tralee town. The objective of the group was to form a creamery that would improve the standard of production of butter for small farmers.¹¹²

Gentry and Nationalist co-operation was not confined to the creation of a butter factory. Other civic functions witnessed regular social interaction between the two groups. By 1884 Nationalist urban traders from Tralee were actively involved in organising popular horse racing events with members of the town's higher orders. The County Kerry Steeplechase Committee consisted of figures such as F.R. Bateman, Sir Henry Donovan, Lieutenant Colonel Denny and William Denny, all members of the area's gentry. Edward Harrington also sat on its committee as did Thomas Lyons, another founding member of the Tralee Land League.¹¹³ Similarly, a sporting event, known as the Kerry Athletic Sports Day (established originally in 1878) was organised by a

¹⁰⁹ Walpole was always an out spoken critic of landlordism. However, he opposed home rule during the 1870s and by the 1880s he never supported the Land League. He was well respected within agrarian society and had formerly given evidence to the Bessborough Commission in 1880. Furthermore, he was one of the first tenants to have a judicial rent fixed in the county when he had his rent reduced from £400 per annum to £360 in December 1881; see *T.C.*, 15 June 1875; *Bessborough Commission...* p. 803; *Return, according to provinces and counties, of judicial rents fixed by sub-commissioners and Civil Bill Courts, as notified to the Irish Land Commission, up to 31 Dec. 1881*, p. 76 [C 3120], H.C. 1882, lvi.1

¹¹⁰ Both were present at the large K.T.D.A. demonstration in Tralee in January 1877, see *T.C.*, 12 Jan. 1877.

¹¹¹ *K.E.P.*, 21 Feb. 1885.

¹¹² *K.W.R.*, 21 Feb. 1885.

combination of Tralee Nationalists, urban Protestant traders and gentry. Founding members of the Land League and leading political agitators in the town, such as M.J. Horgan and O'Connor Horgan, sat on the sports day committee with a whole host of gentry luminaries. Thomas Lyons acted as secretary to the group and Edward Harrington was a member of the committee. Protestant traders from Tralee also partook.¹¹⁴ By 1884 the committee demonstrated its financial clout when it raised £300 for the purchase of a new ground for its sports.¹¹⁵ Despite the politicisation of society that had occurred during the previous number of years, Nationalist traders, who were central elements to the emergence of the land agitation in Tralee town and the county in general, displayed a willingness and ability to co-operate with gentry figures over civic issues, such as improvement in agricultural techniques, and the organisation of local sporting events. Much of this occurred during 1884 and the first number of months of 1885. This demonstrated that despite the objectives of the National League, the Unionist and Nationalist divisions of home rule did not dominate local politics in Tralee town during this period.

4.5: The emergence of Parnellism and the Royal Visit, April 1885.

The level of co-operation between would be Nationalists and Unionists at a local level in Tralee town contradicted the political battle at the level of high politics. Parnellites were engaged in a propaganda battle with the government administration in Dublin Castle. William O'Brien and Tim Healy, through the pages of *United Ireland*, frequently attacked the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Spencer, and his Chief Secretary, Trevelyan in language that Spencer believed to be 'violent and abusive beyond all precedent'.¹¹⁶ This extreme rhetoric was the political language utilised by Parnell's lieutenants to promote the National League and home rule and created a form of 'pseudo-revolutionary violence of utterance', which became the norm for Nationalists during the

¹¹³ *K.E.P.*, 10 May 1884.

¹¹⁴ For a large list of those who organised the Kerry Athletic Sports see *K.E.P.*, 21 Jan. 1885.

¹¹⁵ *K.E.P.*, 30 Apr., 1884.

¹¹⁶ Sally Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War* (Dublin, 1990), p. 73.

period.¹¹⁷ This official language of the movement, which drew on Nationalist rhetoric dating to Daniel O’Connell’s repeal movement, permeated to a local level. At a meeting in Milltown in December 1884 a speech by Edward Harrington exemplified this language. He stated:

why should they (Irish people) be slaves to any land or to any nation, no matter how powerful... no land or no country where intelligent, educated, and right minded people exist should be without the right and the without the principle of having a government of its own.¹¹⁸

During the same speech he evoked populist historical grievances with England when he stated: ‘the greatest and biggest land grabber was England... for over seven centuries, and the Irish people have always looked on the English as land grabbers in Ireland.’¹¹⁹ A number of months later in May 1885, at another National League meeting in Lixnaw, a local activist, G. J. Rice, echoed Harrington’s words when he claimed: ‘Ireland was never to be created to be the slave or subject of England... we don’t want England’s laws’.¹²⁰ Editorials in the league’s mouthpiece, the *Kerry Sentinel*, carried on in a similar vein. The National League movement was depicted as ‘struggling to be free from a tyrannical misgovernment’. Emigration was explained as: ‘we see our country depleted to a third of its natural population and we know that British rule caused it’.¹²¹ This criticism of the government and ‘English rule’, which often verged on extremism, was born out of the Nationalist ideology emanating from the pages of *United Ireland* and Parnell’s lieutenants that attempted to justify the necessity of home rule. This was a development from the rhetoric of the Land League which, although Nationalist, largely attacked landlordism as opposed to ‘English rule’. The lack of immediate economic and social motivations in the spring of 1885 to ignite mass mobilisation, led to this highly inflammable language designed to sustain a ‘high level of popular indignation or sense of grievance-the elementary basis of Nationalism-against the “English oppressor”’.¹²² Furthermore, this language can be placed in the context of an attempt by Parnellites ‘to shape the nature of Irish national identity itself in one of the most formative periods of

¹¹⁷ Frank Callanan, *T.M. Healy* (Cork, 1996), p. 93.

¹¹⁸ *K.S.*, 16 Dec. 1884.

¹¹⁹ *K.S.*, 16 Dec. 1884.

¹²⁰ *K.S.*, 26 May 1885.

¹²¹ *K.S.*, 1 May 1885.

modern Irish history'.¹²³ Notwithstanding the long-term effects of this process on the development and construction of Nationalist ideology, in March 1885 the co-operative action of Tralee Nationalists and Unionists appeared to demonstrate that such rhetoric remained to some extent an abstract concept in the day to day affairs of local business and that, as of yet, the notion of home rule was far from a paramount influence over local political activity.

The failure of the rhetoric of the National League to mobilise anti-government feeling in Kerry was demonstrated during the visit of the Lord Lieutenant, Spencer to the south-west in September 1884. He received a cool reception in Millstreet where banners proclaimed 'God save Ireland' and 'Parnell for ever'.¹²⁴ Similarly, when he arrived in Kerry he was met with a hostile reception in Castleisland where 'black flags with deaths head and cross bones were displayed to welcome him instead of the union jack; and the principal inhabitant, a small shopkeeper, endeavoured to obtain advertisement and to gain mention in the press by refusing to take the viceroys proffered hand'.¹²⁵ Despite this reception in Castleisland, the rest of the visit to the county was largely a success. With the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in the county central to organising the visit, Spencer received favourable receptions in Killarney, Tralee and Listowel. In Tralee, he visited the Catholic dean of the parish, Coffey, while in Listowel, the Catholic canon for the region, Davis, received him. Those who greeted Spencer were not confined to the county's gentry and higher clergy. In Listowel an address from the majority of the town's elected commissioners and traders was granted to him illustrating a degree of popular support.¹²⁶ This reception was especially favourable and Spencer was reported as saying that he 'would always remember with pleasant feelings, the kind reception he met in Listowel'.¹²⁷ Canon Griffin of Millstreet, who was central to orchestrating the visit, later received a letter from Spencer stating: 'I greatly enjoyed my trip to Kerry and received much kindness from all classes of the people. That some expressions of disapproval

¹²² James Loughlin, *Gladstone, home rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-93* (Dublin, 1987), p. 28.

¹²³ James Loughlin, 'Nationality and loyalty: Parnellism, monarchy and the construction of Irish identity, 1880-5' in Boyce, Day (eds), *Ireland in transition, 1867-1921* (London, 2004), p.35.

¹²⁴ J.H. Murphy, *Abject loyalty: Nationalism and monarchy in Ireland during the reign of Queen Victoria* (Cork, 2001), p. 226.

¹²⁵ A.E. Turner, *Sixty years of a soldier's life* (London, 1912), p. 187.

¹²⁶ *K.S.*, 12 Sept. 1884.

¹²⁷ *K.W.R.*, 13 Sept. 1884.

should have appeared was but natural, and it is better that they should be made than suppressed'.¹²⁸ The visit underpinned certain developments that had emerged during the late agitation. The Roman Catholic clerical hierarchy in the county remained conservative and supportive of the government. This support was augmented by the appointment of Bishop Higgins in late December 1881. He was seen by the government as being an opponent of the Land League and was appointed under British influence at the Vatican.¹²⁹ Ties between the leading government figures in the Vatican and Kerry Catholic clergy remained into the decade. George Errington, whose 'mission' in Rome gave 'weight to the government view whenever episcopal succession or precedence was being decided', was in regular contact with Canon Griffin.¹³⁰ In June 1883, Errington wrote to Griffin thanking him for a letter explaining circumstances in Kerry, which was shown to the Pope and subsequently published in a French Catholic newspaper. In the letter Errington warmly stated: 'I assure you it is a very great comfort in the often trying circumstances here to have the support of your great knowledge and experience'.¹³¹ Spencer's visit openly demonstrated the loyal alliance of government officials, gentry and leading members of the higher Catholic clergy in the county. Edward Harrington's *Kerry Sentinel* heavily criticised the welcoming receptions received by the Lord Lieutenant. It complained that the clergy who greeted Spencer were not representative of the body of priests in the county and in an editorial stated:

Be he priest or layman who had mixed himself up in this misrepresentation of the feelings of the people, his tongue or pen can never carry a feathers weight of political influence amongst his people.¹³²

However, the unorganised state of Nationalist politics, particularly the National League, undermined any potential demonstrations against the visit. Of the towns visited by Spencer, both Listowel and Castleisland had branches of the league in existence.

¹²⁸ Spencer to Griffin, 16 Sept. 1884 (Kerry Diocesan Records Killarney (K.D.R.K.), Priests Papers: box 3/ Griffin, A.S./Correspondence).

¹²⁹ When the bishopric of Kerry became vacant, Lord Granville, the British government's head of the foreign office informed Rome that Higgins was a far better candidate than his competitor, Archdeacon O'Sullivan, who was described as a 'man of extreme political views', see C.J. Woods, 'Ireland and Anglo-Papal relations, 1880-85' in *I.H.S.* 18 (Mar., 1972), 69, p. 30; Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the modern Irish state, 1878-86*, pp 143- 4.

¹³⁰ Woods, 'Ireland and Anglo- Papal relations, 1880-85', p. 42.

¹³¹ Errington to Griffin, 5 June 1883 (K.D.R.K., Priests Papers: box 3/ Griffin, Arthur. Sandes. /Correspondence).

However, it was only in Castleisland that any significant opposition to the visit was in evidence. Even there confusion reigned amongst the Nationalists after the president of the branch P.D. Kenny had an informal conversation with Spencer. In turn, the members of the branch expelled Kenny from the presidency.¹³³ In all, the visit demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the National League within the county in September 1884. No clear policy directed the few branches in existence, and the government aligned with members of the higher Roman Catholic clergy along with the Unionist gentry orchestrated a successful visit.

The situation had rapidly changed by the time of the announcement of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Ireland in March 1885. At the level of high politics, Lord Spencer, organised the trip to arouse popular support for the royalty and undermine Parnellism. In turn, Parnellites, and in particular William O'Brien, identified the necessity to create and sustain popular opposition to the visit as a method of promoting the National League in Ireland and to portray the Nationalist demand for home rule to the watching English public.¹³⁴ In March the central branch of the National League sent a circular to all branches explaining that the prince was to be treated with 'silent indifference'. Local branches responded by passing resolutions to that effect.¹³⁵ The leadership of the league believed that this policy would strike a balance between indignation and respect, which would further the constitutional campaign to convince British opinion of the case for home rule. However, the prince's arrival in Dublin was a success with a large turnout of loyalists. In turn, a more aggressive policy was adopted by the Parnellites. Fearing that the visit might prove successful, the league attempted to make the visit an occasion for ideological polarisation or as William Redmond noted: 'the present was the occasion to draw a line between the Nationalists and the anti-Nationalists'.¹³⁶ In turn, when the prince arrived in Mallow in county Cork a mass

¹³² *K.S.*, 12 Sept. 1885.

¹³³ *K.W.R.*, 27 Sept. 1885

¹³⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of the political motivations around the visit see, Murphy, *Abject loyalty*, pp 228-42; James Loughlin, 'Nationality and loyalty: Parnellism, monarchy and the construction of Irish identity, 1880-5' in D.G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Ireland in transition, 1867-1921* (London, 2004), pp 35- 56.

¹³⁵ For examples of resolutions passed in Kerry see Listowel National League meeting *K.S.*, 17 Mar. 1885 and Tralee League meeting *K.S.*, 24 Mar. 1885.

¹³⁶ Murphy, *Abject loyalty*, p. 234.

demonstration was held by William O'Brien, M.P. for the town, leading to rioting and police baton charges.¹³⁷ This demonstration and fracas with the police provided the Parnellites with much propaganda to chastise the visit and promote the National League

Since Spencer's original visit in September 1884 the National League had progressed somewhat within Kerry. With the arrival of 1885 the necessity for the reforming of the league was essential for the forthcoming general election. By the end of 1884 a branch was established in Killarney and the defunct Listowel branch was reorganised.¹³⁸ During these months the authorities failed to implement the powers under the 1882 Crimes Act to suppress political meetings, freeing league organisers to promote the organisation.¹³⁹ In turn, a number of league public demonstrations were successfully held in the county.¹⁴⁰ By April 1885 twelve active National League branches regularly reported proceedings of branch meetings in the *Kerry Sentinel*.¹⁴¹ Branches demonstrated a high level of organisation, and a degree of influence in localities. When an election for the position of relieving officer arose on the Killarney Board of Guardians, both the Castleisland and Killarney National League branches wanted to elect an evicted tenant from Lord Kenmare's estate named Jeremiah Crowley.¹⁴² During the meeting of the guardians to decide on the issue, a circular was handed around to those present 'which called upon the guardians to support "the victim of landlord tyranny" [Crowley]'.¹⁴³ Crowley was duly elected.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the league demonstrated a high level of influence

¹³⁷ Loughlin, 'Nationality and loyalty', p. 52.

¹³⁸ For the inaugural meeting of the Killarney National League, see *K.S.*, 28 Oct. 1884; For Listowel see *K.S.*, 16 Dec. 1884.

¹³⁹ The Liberal government remained divided over the retention of the Crimes Act which was due to pass in 1885. Spencer was in favour of maintaining elements of the Act including the right to suppress meetings. However, the legislation was withdrawn in its entirety in July after the government resigned in June 1885, see Virginia Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), pp 150-1.

¹⁴⁰ For National League meeting at Milltown, see, *K.S.*, 16 Dec. 1884, at Ballydonoghue, see, *K.S.*, 30 Dec. 1884, and at Ballylongford, see, *K.S.*, 27 Jan. 1885.

¹⁴¹ The branches existed in Killarney, Ballydonoghue, Milltown, Knockanure, Tralee, Barrowduff, Ballymacelligott, Listry, Castlemaine, Currans, Ballyduff, and Ballylongford.

¹⁴² At a meeting of the Killarney branch a deputation from the Castleisland League attended seeking support for Crowley, see *K.S.*, 23 Dec. 1884.

¹⁴³ *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Poor Law Guardians (Ireland) Bill; with the proceedings, evidence, and index*, p. 70, H.C. 1884-5 (297), x, 281. This information was part of the evidence given to the commission by Colonel Spraight, the Local Government Board Inspector for Kerry. He was present at the board meeting.

¹⁴⁴ *K.S.*, 16 Jan. 1885. The position of relieving officer contained extensive patronage as they decided on the merits of individuals applying for relief. In this case the position was for the Coom Dispensary District. This district lay between Killarney and Castleisland.

and organisation over an election of ratepayers for the position of coronership in Listowel. The Listowel branch put forward one of its leading members for the position, Dr Clancy.¹⁴⁵ During the election, banners appeared in the town announcing: 'vote for Mr Parnell and the Nationalist, Clancy'. Although receiving less than half the votes, with 399 out of 856, he did gain a majority and was duly elected.¹⁴⁶ Despite this success, Edward Harrington criticised the Listowel League. In an editorial in the *Sentinel* he stated that such localised objectives were not part of the 'national programme'. By concentrating on the election, he accused the branch of neglecting their weekly business and stated that it 'must show some broader national activity'.¹⁴⁷ This demonstrated that even where branches of the National League were established the political ideology of home rule failed to dominate their proceedings. Significantly, National Leaguers in Kerry demonstrated a preoccupation with controlling patronage over local government positions. In these branches little comment on home rule occurred and the registration of voters, a task which the central branch of the league had determined as being of paramount importance, was largely ignored.

As on the occasion of the successful visit of Lord Spencer the previous September, the local gentry, Protestant community and sections of the county's higher Roman Catholic clergy made preparations to welcome the prince in April 1885. In Killarney a total of two hundred workmen were employed painting and decorating the train line in royal regalia and pageantry.¹⁴⁸ Similarly in Tralee, Sir Henry Donovan, a Catholic liberal who had supported The O'Donoghue's election in 1880, ordered two hundred flags for the prince's reception.¹⁴⁹ When the royal party arrived in Killarney a large deputation of the county's gentry, government officials, and some Roman Catholic clergy welcomed the prince.¹⁵⁰ The newly reformed National League organised counter demonstrations wherever the royal visit went. In Killarney leading National Leaguers

¹⁴⁵ Clancy was one of the founding members of the Listowel League. When the branch was reorganised in December he chaired the meeting, see *K.S.*, 23 Dec. 1884.

¹⁴⁶ *K.S.*, 27 Feb. 1885.

¹⁴⁷ *K.S.*, 6 Mar. 1885.

¹⁴⁸ *K.E.P.*, 4 Apr. 1885.

¹⁴⁹ *K.E.P.*, 22 Apr. 1885.

¹⁵⁰ Landlords who attended included Lord Kenmare and Daniel Clotsman, along with several Justices' of the Peace, the R.I.C. County Inspector, Local Government Board Inspector, Colonel Spraight, the Crown Solicitor, Charles Morphy, and the Clerk of the Peace, Stephen Huggard.

demonstrated and the royal entourage was reportedly hissed as it went through the town.¹⁵¹ When the royal party arrived in Tralee it was met by members of the gentry, civil servants and middle class Protestant figures such as William Hill. When a band began playing 'God Save the Queen' on the platform of the train station, the Nationalist demonstrators outside responded with 'national airs' including 'God Save Ireland'. Similar scenes occurred when the visit went on to Listowel where the people held up banners with slogans calling on the prince to remember Mallow and Myles Joyce [executed for the Maamtransa murders].¹⁵² The prince was welcomed by Unionist figures while the freshly organised leaguers attempted to upstage the visit by holding counter demonstrations.

As James Murphy has pointed out the royal visit had repercussions for the monarchy in Ireland and for the first time Nationalists were forced into open displays of hostility and antipathy to the royal family.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the prince's visit affected politics in the county for a number of reasons. By April 1885 the success of the National League was still in doubt. Growth in local branches of the league since 1882 had been unimpressive, and the party newspaper, *United Ireland*, failed to make a profit until 1884.¹⁵⁴ The increase in league activity was still in its infancy and the extent of its potential success uncertain. In Kerry the activity of branches concentrated on local issues such as extending patronage over local government appointments and had little broader 'Nationalist' character. The hostile reception of the prince in the county was coordinated by local league branches under the influence of the central branch in Dublin. Correspondingly the infrastructure of the league orchestrated similar demonstrations in Cork and Limerick and countrywide Nationalist opinion was opposed to the visit. Whereas previously, National League activity was concentrated on specific by-elections, and in Kerry branches were preoccupied by local issues, these mass demonstrations provided the movement with an immediate 'national' focus. It further instilled the idea of the league as a national and mass movement operating on a countrywide basis. The visit

¹⁵¹ Figures such as J.D. Sheehan, a hotel owner, Daniel Shea, a general smith, and a vintner named Michael Warren were the leading figures who held the demonstration, see *K.W.R.*, 4 Apr. 1885, For the occupations of these figures see *Guy's Munster Directory*, pp 561-7.

¹⁵² *K.W.R.*, 25 Apr. 1885; Murphy, *Abject loyalty*, p. 238.

¹⁵³ Murphy, *Abject loyalty*, p. 241.

¹⁵⁴ Loughlin, 'Nationality and royalty', p. 46.

also gave a substantive basis to the previously abstract Nationalist language promulgated by the league's leaders. The sight of the prince aligned with the local aristocratic, Protestant, and 'loyal' Catholic clerical figures in the trappings of royal regalia undoubtedly gave the historic and emotive Nationalist language a tangible basis. Within Kerry, the visit further polarised opinion between National Leaguers and the gentry and middle class Protestants. The visit gave an injection of Nationalist/Unionist politics hitherto lacking within the county since the agrarianism of the Land League, and provided a popular platform for the ideology of Parnellism, which emanated from the central executive.

4.6 The National League, G.A.A. and Fenianism.

After the prince's visit to the county the National League movement continued to spread. By the end of June 1885 twenty-three branches of the league had been established in the county.¹⁵⁵ Despite this growth by July internal divisions threatened to split the movement. A rift developed between radical members of the Tralee League and its president Edward Harrington. Since the emergence of the Land League in the town, a radical Fenian element was a constant force in the movement. Central to this faction within the branch was Michael Power who was publicly and widely known as a Fenian.¹⁵⁶ Power was a successful pig dealer and was regularly elected to the Tralee Poor Law Board as a guardian for the town. Other figures within the branch that were associated with Fenianism included William Moore Stack, whose political origins lay in the 1867 rising, M.J. Nolan (Nolan fled the country after the failed rising in 1867) and John Healy.¹⁵⁷ All these figures were prominent supporters of the Land League and were arrested under the P.P.P. Act, 1881.¹⁵⁸ By 1885 they remained active in local politics and

¹⁵⁵ Report on progress of Irish National Land League from 1 Jan.-30 June 1885 (N.A.I., ILLNLP, carton vii, Irish National League proceedings 1885-90).

¹⁵⁶ In the pre-land war period Power frequently organised Manchester Martyr demonstrations in Tralee. By December 1880 he was commonly referred to in Tralee as Captain Power. See Capt. Phibbs to Chief Secretary's Office, 30 Dec. 1880 (NAI, CSO RP, 1881 1221). He was one of the central activists behind the Land League in Tralee and was imprisoned under the P.P.P. Act.

¹⁵⁷ Nolan died in October 1885. His exile was referred to in newspaper reports at this period, see *K.S.*, 30 Oct. 1885.

¹⁵⁸ *Return of persons who have been or are in custody under the Protection of Person and Property (Ireland) Act, 1881, up to 31 Mar. 1882*, p. 156, H.C. 1882, (156) lv. 635. Stack, Nolan, and Healy, were archetypal urban Fenian supporters who were part of the urban lower middle class of artisans and clerks.

were founding members of the National League in the town.¹⁵⁹ During the land war they were closely connected with the Harringtons and were a central section of the Parnellism of the Land League. However, in July 1885 tensions surfaced between these two groups over the issue of G.A.A. sports, which highlighted the increasingly divergent direction of Fenianism and Parnellism in the town. These Fenians, along with Maurice Moynihan, were central to the creation of a branch of the G.A.A in Tralee. Moynihan had become prominent as a Fenian organiser in the town and in 1885 he was appointed the secretary of the G.A.A. in the county and was suspected of holding the same position within the I.R.B.¹⁶⁰ Edward Harrington failed to join the new Nationalist sports organisation and remained associated with the organising committee of what was by this stage termed the Tralee Athletic Sports Day. Although pro-league businessmen from Tralee were previously associated with these sports, it remained connected with landlordism. Furthermore, it had aligned itself with the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (I.A.A.A.), which was the Irish wing of a broader English organisation and was established in Ireland three months previously to counter the rise of the G.A.A.¹⁶¹ The newly established G.A.A. specifically challenged the annual athletic sports day and held a competing event on the same date. Both sports events took place on 17 June 1885. The G.A.A. event proved far more popular and the Unionist *Kerry Evening Post* reported that at the athletic sports 'the large stand was filled with the elite of the county. Outside the stand, there was a marked absence of the public who usually support the athletic meeting'.¹⁶² Over 10,000 attended the G.A.A. event along with Michael Cusack, the national secretary of the G.A.A. The sports participated in included athletics and a hurling match. Reportedly only

Their occupations were respectively law clerk, tinsman and harness maker, see Lists of persons arrested under the PPP Act, numbers 210-420 (N.A.I., CSO RP/ ICR 6). William Moore Stack was a well known 1867 Fenian. By 1879 he had a senior post in the I.R.B. and went to Paris on probable I.R.B. business, see J.A. Gaughan, *Austin Stack: portrait of a separatist* (Dublin, 1977), p. 14.

¹⁵⁹ *K.S.*, 24 Feb. 1885.

¹⁶⁰ Moynihan took no part in the Land League due to his youth (he was born in 1864). A teacher in the school he attended, St Michael's College, Listowel, influenced him to become involved in Fenianism. Deirdre McMahon, (ed.), *The Moynihan brothers in peace and war, 1909-1918: their new Ireland*, (Dublin, 2004), p. xiv; J.A. Gaughan, *A political odyssey: Thomas O'Donnell, M.P. for west Kerry* (Dublin, 1983), p. 22-3; File on W.M. Stack (P.R.O., CO 904/18/50).

¹⁶¹ Owen Magee, *The I.R.B.: the Irish republican brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 2005), p. 164.

¹⁶² *K.E.P.*, 20 June 1885.

500 attended the I.A.A.A. sports including Edward Harrington.¹⁶³ Evidently, Harrington failed to realise the potential popularity of the nascent G.A.A.

The attendance at the G.A.A. sports was large and easily out-numbered political meetings of the National League indicating that the emergence of the G.A.A. in Tralee or in other regions in the country was not necessarily inspired by Nationalist politics as has been asserted by many historians.¹⁶⁴ Significantly, the failure of the public to support the landlord orientated sports appeared to have been a rejection of the elitism of this group. During 1884-85 Edward Harrington and other sections of the urban middle class league leadership were increasingly associated with this group, not just through organising sports events but also over efforts to create a butter factory in the town. After Edward Harrington failed to support the G.A.A. event he was chastised for his association with the upper classes. During a National League meeting after the sports day it was stated that Harrington 'had come to Tralee unknown-a stranger from the county of Cork. The people had lifted him upon their shoulders, and he had kicked the ladder by which he had ascended'.¹⁶⁵ Indeed a degree of social elitism surrounded the athletic sports with the county's 'elite' located in the 'large stand' and the 'public' outside it. Furthermore, rules of the Irish Amateur Athletic Association ensured that their games could not be enjoyed by those whose incomes were low or whose social standing made them unwelcome companions for those in control of these institutions. In contrast the G.A.A. had lower subscriptions with less emphasis on class. In essence the G.A.A. offered an opportunity for large sections of the population to participate in the late Victorian sporting revolution.¹⁶⁶ Importantly, large sections of the population could readily identify with a movement which met their social and economic position and rivalled the elitism of the upper classes.

¹⁶³ Danny Curtin, 'Edward Harrington and the first G.A.A. event in Kerry' in *The Kerry Magazine*, no. 11, 2000, p. 12.

¹⁶⁴ For an account of the role Nationalism played in the emergence of the G.A.A. see Marcus De Burca, *The G.A.A.: a history* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2000), pp 15-33. For an outline of the historiography of the G.A.A. and the importance of its link with Nationalism see Neal Garnham, 'Accounting for the early success of the Gaelic Athletic Association' in *I.H.S.*, xxxiv, no. 133 (May 2004), pp 65-78.

¹⁶⁵ *K.E.P.*, 24 June 1885.

¹⁶⁶ Neal Garnham, 'Accounting for the early success of the Gaelic Athletic Association' in *I.H.S.*, xxxiv, no. 133 (May 2004), p. 78.

Within Nationalist politics the division between the sports represented a broader power struggle between Harrington and the more Fenian inspired members of the movement. The Franchise Act of 1884 and the Redistribution Act of 1885 greatly altered the nature of parliamentary electoral politics, increasing the countrywide electorate from 225,999 to 737,965, many of whom were small farmers and agricultural labourers.¹⁶⁷ Also, many of the smaller boroughs were abolished and single seat constituencies were created.¹⁶⁸ In Kerry, the two county seats and the Tralee borough were replaced by four constituencies; North Kerry, West Kerry, South Kerry and East Kerry. By 1891 the combined parliamentary electorate for Kerry was 20,793 compared to 5,582 in 1880.¹⁶⁹ The increase in the franchise made the election of league supported candidates a formality. In Tralee, this meant that whoever the town's branch of the National League nominated for the newly created constituency of West Kerry would inevitably win the Westminster seat. In turn, the Tralee branch intensively prepared for the election. In April the branch established a registration committee to ensure newly enfranchised parliamentary voters were registered.¹⁷⁰ Within a number of weeks the committee identified a large number of potential voters that were unregistered and set about enrolling them.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the branch initiated efforts to hold a county convention of the league to nominate candidates for the election. The Tralee branch communicated with other leagues over the issue and proposed to hold the convention in July. Timothy Harrington wrote to the Tralee branch giving his consent to the holding of a convention. Perhaps in anticipation that the Tralee branch were attempting to exert a degree of influence over the convention, he warned that no one branch was to assume predominance and that the Central Branch remained in control over the proceedings. He stated that he would attend as a representative of the Central Branch and that it would provide him with 'an opportunity of meeting my friends in Kerry upon such an occasion'.¹⁷² However, before the convention was held the disagreement over the sports

¹⁶⁷ K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1984), pp 87-88.

¹⁶⁸ Comerford, 'Tipperary representation at Westminster, 1801-1918' in T.G. McGrath and William Nolan (eds), *Tipperary: history and society* (Dublin, 1985), p. 335.

¹⁶⁹ B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results, 1801-1922*, pp 353-34, p. 284, p. 315.

¹⁷⁰ *K.S.*, 28 April 1885.

¹⁷¹ *K.S.*, 12, May 1885. Registering voters became one of the main objectives of the organising committee in Dublin.

¹⁷² *K.S.*, 9 June 1885.

occurred. At the meeting of the National League following the sports day, Edward Harrington was removed from his position as president of the Tralee League for his failure to support the G.A.A. event. His removal was orchestrated by the radical faction in the league who elected William Moore Stack, a publicly renowned Fenian, as its new president.¹⁷³

Harrington's expulsion took on a broader significance and threatened the unity of the newly developed 'Nationalism' of the period. In a public letter to Edward Harrington Archbishop Croke distanced himself from the actions of the Tralee G.A.A. and leaguers and stated that when he promoted the revival of the 'national' sports he 'had no idea of extending or discouraging all other sports whatever'.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the actions of the Tralee Leaguers antagonised the Organising Committee of the league. Spearheaded by his brother, Timothy, the Committee condemned the expulsion of Edward Harrington.¹⁷⁵ In an increasingly public and widely reported split, Timothy wrote to the national newspapers denying any connection between the National League and the G.A.A. in an attempt to debase the legitimacy of the actions of the Tralee Leaguers. He wrote that 'those who have used the name of the National League, in connection with the G.A.A. have done so without authorisation'. Furthermore, he claimed that the prominent members of the G.A.A. were not members of the league and 'have never in anyway so identified themselves with national politics as to establish a claim upon members of that organisation'.¹⁷⁶ Potentially the issue had the ability to exacerbate tensions between Fenians and the National League. By 1885, the organisation of the I.R.B. was greatly undermined by the arrest of a number of high profile Fenians by the Crime Special Branch, directed by the zealous under-secretary E.G. Jenkinson. Also, a number of other prominent I.R.B. men, including two Cork city I.R.B. leaders, James Christopher Flynn and John O'Connor, were won over by Parnell and 'defected' to constitutional politics.¹⁷⁷ However, the G.A.A. was emerging as a large-scale sporting movement, which was to a

¹⁷³ *K.S.*, 6 July 1885.

¹⁷⁴ *K.S.*, 3 July 1885.

¹⁷⁵ *K.S.*, 30 June 1885.

¹⁷⁶ *U.I.*, 27 June 1885.

¹⁷⁷ For an account of the successful defeat of the I.R.B. by governmental forces during 1882-4 see, Magee, *The I.R.B.: the Irish republican brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Fein*, pp 119-34. For I.R.B. defections to Parnell, *ibid*, p. 139-40; James McConnel, 'Fenians at Westminster: the Edwardian Irish Parliamentary Party and the legacy of the New Departure' in *I.H.S.*, xxiv, no. 133 (May, 2004), p. 51.

large extent infiltrated by Fenians and linked to the advanced separatist tradition.¹⁷⁸ By publicly claiming the G.A.A. and the National League were separate organisations, Harrington aggravated these potential divisions. Michael Cusack, the founder and secretary of the G.A.A., saw the actions of Harrington as a threat to his organisation. In another published letter, this time written to the Tralee Fenian and G.A.A. organiser Michael Power, Cusack bitterly criticised the Harringtons by stating:

Timothy Harrington is supreme dictator of Ireland-if people submit.... He has attempted to bolster up his brother and to crush us with a brutality and bad taste which would appear the chief characteristics of the family. Either the Harringtons must go or the people must go.¹⁷⁹

A number of weeks later he privately deplored to Michael Davitt that 'Mr. Timothy Harrington and W.D. Hickson will no longer say anything good of the G.A.A.'¹⁸⁰ He concluded that they will have to 'face any party that shows its hostility to the G.A.A. We don't care how formidable the thing may be'.¹⁸¹ Evidently, the divisions in the Tralee League had wider ramifications for the Nationalist movement with potential dissension between the G.A.A. and the National League.

Within Kerry, the situation came to a head when Edward and Timothy Harrington addressed a demonstration in Abbeydorney under the auspices of the local National League branch, headed by the parish priest, Fr Brosnan. During the meeting both Harringtons spoke and were met by a chorus of boos and cheers. In the middle of the demonstration a contingent of the Tralee Leaguers arrived, led by William Moore Stack and Michael Power.¹⁸² A tirade of insults and accusations followed between the two groups and the meeting broke up in disorder. Soon after, the central branch, under the direction of Timothy Harrington, dissolved the Tralee League for reportedly disrupting a National League meeting.¹⁸³

Opponents of the league seized on the opportunity to criticise what some saw as the increasing hierarchical and autocratic nature of the organisation. The Unionist *Dublin Evening Mail* commented in its editorial:

¹⁷⁸ Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: politics and war* (Oxford, 1999), p. 183.

¹⁷⁹ *K.W.R.*, 4 July 1885.

¹⁸⁰ Cusack to Davitt, 23 July 1885 (Trinity College, Dublin, Davitt Papers/ 9346/469).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *U.L.*, 11 July 1885.

the summary fashion in which the Central Branch of the National League snuffed out the Tralee branch of that association on Tuesday, will probably serve as a warning to similar bodies throughout the country not to flatter themselves that they possess the smallest portion of independence in the matter of home rule.¹⁸⁴

The Times of London, pointing to the case in Tralee, complained that 'Parnell's despotic will is enforced by his subordinate officers'. It went on to state that the branches were subject to the Central Branch and 'are ruled with a rod of iron and are not allowed to do or say anything which does not accord with the instructions of Mr. Harrington'.¹⁸⁵

Accusations that the league acted in a dictatorial fashion had become one of the chief criticisms of Parnell and the movement. Much of this criticism emerged after the failure of the Irish parliamentary party to create a governing council of the National League. This council, which was stipulated under the 1882 constitution of the league, was to be made up of elected M.P.s and thirty two delegates elected by county conventions of the local branches. However, the council never emerged and power remained in the hands of the non-elected Organising Committee.¹⁸⁶ Condemnation of the hierarchical nature of the organisation was not confined to the exponents of Unionist and Conservative opposition. During August, Davitt called on the proposed council to be established, which 'should meet in Dublin occasionally, and direct the attention of the Irish race'.¹⁸⁷ This policy contradicted the centralisation of power within the hands of the leading figures of the Irish parliamentary party. By 1885 this had been achieved through the creation of the National League and had developed as a central aspect of Parnellism.

Indeed, Davitt was personally close to many of the Tralee Leaguers and was undoubtedly aware of the schism in the town's politics between Harrington and the other members of the league. In July 1884 he had spoken at an event in Tralee organised by William Moore Stack.¹⁸⁸ The proceeds of the event went to a printer named Brosnan, who had been discharged by Edward Harrington from the offices of the *Sentinel*. During

¹⁸³ *K.W.R.*, 18 July 1885.

¹⁸⁴ Reprinted in *K.W.R.*, 18 July 1885.

¹⁸⁵ *The Times*, 17 Aug. 1885.

¹⁸⁶ O'Brien, *Parnell and his party*, p. 127.

¹⁸⁷ *U.I.*, 8 Aug. 1885.

¹⁸⁸ *K.W.R.*, 26 July 1884.

Davitt's visit Harrington, unsurprisingly, made no appearance.¹⁸⁹ In July 1884, Davitt's relationship with the National League had greatly deteriorated. His policy of 'land nationalisation' ostracised him from the heart of Irish Nationalist politics. Since the inception of the National League, a campaign orchestrated by the likes of T.M. Healy, and Timothy Harrington attempted to, in the words of Davitt, 'push me to the wall'.¹⁹⁰ During the same month as Davitt delivered his speech in Tralee, he was informed by William O'Brien that his leading opponents in the league were Timothy Harrington along with T.P. O'Connor and Dr Kenny.¹⁹¹ The actions of Davitt's opponents and his disillusionment with what he saw as the increasing dictatorial nature of the league led to him leaving the country to undertake a worldwide trip. While in Rome during March 1885 he wrote to another dissenting Nationalist, Alfred Webb, stating that if he had 'stayed I would have collided with the Organising Committee' and believed that he could 'never participate in it so long as two or three men are allowed to boss it in the name of nationality and democracy'.¹⁹² Despite these words, Davitt did return to the political stage in Ireland sooner rather than later.

By July 1885 Davitt had returned to Ireland. Although a member of the Organising Committee of the league, he frequently criticised aspects of the movement. Along with calling for the formation of the elected councils, he condemned the constant focus of the movement on the return of M.P.s. He wrote in July 1885:

is there another field in which men, who have both personal and political objections to membership of the British Legislature, can labour more effectively for Ireland than in Parliament?... I strongly object to the theory implied by *United Ireland*, that an Irish Nationalist is only suitably equipped for service against Ireland's enemy when he is armed with the letters 'M.P.'.... Carry on the fight here at home on the lines of the Land League against the enemy that will outnumber the Irish phalanx in Westminster.¹⁹³

He continued his tirade by evoking his Fenian past when he stated he would not seek election for the House of Commons because of the necessity to take the oath of

¹⁸⁹ The purpose of the meeting was not stated in the local newspapers during the visit. The motive of recuperating a discharged printer of Harrington's, was later discussed at a meeting of the Tralee National League after Harrington's expulsion, see *K.S.*, 30 June 1885.

¹⁹⁰ Entry in Michael Davitt's personal diary, 4 July 1884 (T.C.D., Davitt papers/ 9541)

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Davitt to Webb, 5 Mar. 1885 (T.C.D., Davitt papers/9490/4959).

¹⁹³ *U.I.*, 25 July 1885.

allegiance.¹⁹⁴ The following week he delivered a lecture at the Rotunda in Dublin to raise money for James Stephens. In his lecture, entitled: 'Fenian movement and the Land League: twenty years of Irish history', he continued to outline his ideas on political action. While acknowledging that the 'prudence and moderation' being professed by the parliamentary party were necessary requisites for political struggle, Davitt contended: 'counsels that appear to substitute conciliation for action, advice that is calculated to damp that enthusiasm without popular forces can never be brought into the field of national politics and can only give encouragement to our enemies.' He reiterated that politics must not be confined to the House of Commons by stating that 'diplomacy may avail for something in Westminster; but it has never achieved anything but defeat for the popular cause in Ireland'.¹⁹⁵ Davitt's comments clearly appealed to Fenian sentiments and criticised the dominance of the parliamentary effort over local concerns. His comments on these issues along with his negative response to the 1885 Land Purchase (Ashbourne) Act were 'an unmistakable attack on the authority and policy of Parnell and his lieutenants'.¹⁹⁶ In particular, Davitt distained the dominance these figures had over the nomination of parliamentary candidates through the county conventions. This was demonstrated at two conventions in Tipperary and Galway when nominated candidates were discarded in favour of nominees that Parnell forced on the constituencies.¹⁹⁷ Davitt's severe and public criticisms were related to the issues at heart in the case of the Tralee League and its suppression. The enforcement of Parnellism over local concerns and disputes was apparent in the Tralee case. Although Davitt did not directly comment on the situation in Tralee, many of the dissenting leaguers may have taken encouragement from his comments, which were made during the period of the upheaval in the branch. Also, despite the defeat of the I.R.B. by Dublin Castle, Fenianism in general appeared to have received a degree of public support in Ireland during 1884-85. In September 1884 a crowd of 15,000 marched through Dublin city centre for the funeral of an old Fenian named Denis Duggan. In April 1885 a subscription was got up for the Fenian leader James Stephens, which in time collected up to £2,000. Furthermore,

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ *U.I.*, 1 Aug. 1885.

¹⁹⁶ Alan O'Day, *Parnell and the first home rule episode* (Dublin, 1986), p. 81.

¹⁹⁷ Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland*, p. 469.

another Fenian leader, John O'Leary, made a triumphant return to Ireland and was greeted by 10,000 people when he arrived in Limerick during March 1885.¹⁹⁸ With Davitt's criticisms of the National League and parliamentary party, and some degree of popular support for Fenianism apparent, a window of opportunity appeared to be in existence for the Tralee Leaguers to gain support from these sources.

While the Tralee Leaguers may have contented themselves that their predicament had larger and national connotations, they quickly concentrated on gaining support within the county. The Tralee branch appeared to have had some amount of support from other regions. On the day the dissolution of the branch was announced, the Tralee Leaguers met delegates from both the Killarney and Castleisland branches.¹⁹⁹ Resolutions were prepared at the next meetings of both branches to condemn the actions of the Organising Committee. The Castleisland branch, under the influence of a section of radical agrarian activists, passed a resolution condemning Timothy Harrington and the Organising Committee.²⁰⁰ In Killarney an attempt was made to pass a similar resolution but was prevented by Jeremiah D. Sheehan. Sheehan was involved in the 1867 Fenian Rising and was still suspected of being a Fenian during the 1880s by the police.²⁰¹ Despite Sheehan's suspected links with Fenianism, he was unwilling to back the Tralee Leaguers, probably out of a desire to obtain the candidacy for the East Kerry constituency.²⁰² Other areas of known Fenianism also failed to back the actions of the Tralee Leaguers. The Causeway National League had a number of known Fenians in its branch. Its secretary, Thomas Dee, and a member of its committee, William Fenix, were both arrested under the P.P.P. Act and were widely known as Fenians.²⁰³ However, the branch failed to comment on the controversy and completely ignored the events. Other areas of National League activity such as Listowel and its surrounding regions, where a number of branches were in existence, remained silent on the issue. Any belief by the Tralee Leaguers that they could

¹⁹⁸ Marcus Bourke, *John O'Leary: a study in Irish separatism* (Tralee, 1967), p. 174.

¹⁹⁹ *K.W.R.*, 18 July 1885.

²⁰⁰ *K.W.R.*, 1 Aug. 1885.

²⁰¹ File on J.D. Sheehan (P.R.O. CO/904, microfilm in N.L.I., p. 956).

²⁰² *K.W.R.*, 22 Aug. 1885.

²⁰³ During the Special Commission in 1889 both Fenix and Thomas Dee were identified by an informer from the region as being Fenian leaders in the area. The informer gave a large amount of evidence relating to Fenianism in the Causeway region, much of which was disputed by a former secretary of the National League named Henry O'Connor. However, O'Connor, a hostile witness, admitted that Fenix was a member of a Fenian society. See *Special Commission... vol. iii*, pp 364- 72 and *Special Commission... vol. ix*, p. 90.

count on widespread support from other regions in the county was quickly dispelled. When the secretary of the Tralee branch, Timothy McEnery, condemned the Central Branch for not funding evicted tenants in Kerry, and called for all subscriptions to be returned to the county, both the Duagh and Firies branches publicly contradicted him and stated they had received large grants.²⁰⁴ Other branches demonstrated further support for Harrington. Resolutions in favour of Harrington were passed at the Killorglin and Dingle Leagues.²⁰⁵ At a National League public meeting in Knockagree on the Cork border between Castleisland and Millstreet, strong support for Harrington was evident from the speakers.²⁰⁶ Within a number of weeks Edward Harrington demonstrated his continued presence within the county by speaking at a National League demonstration in the south Kerry village of Glenbeigh.²⁰⁷

Support for the actions of the Tralee Leaguers centred within Tralee town and from their colleagues in Castleisland. Since the inception of the National League in Castleisland outrage and boycotting was on the increase in the region. Reporting for July 1885, the D.I. for Castleisland, Davis, commented: 'boycotting and intimidation, both by notice and from the National League rooms, are beginning to be very much resorted to particularly when persons having anything to do with evicted farms are brought under the notice of the organisation [league]'.²⁰⁸ Much of this activity emanated from the radical section of the branch. However, moderate influences began exerting influence over the proceedings in the Castleisland branch. In June a new parish priest, named Father Irwin, was appointed to Castleisland by the bishop on the belief that his 'quiet, firm, sympathetic temper fits him eminently for the post'.²⁰⁹ Soon after his appointment members of the Castleisland League approached Irwin and asked him to preside over the branch. Irwin replied in the affirmative and stated the curates of the town could join if

²⁰⁴ *K.W.R.*, 18 July 1885; The Firies branch claimed it got thirty-three grants amounting to £100, see *K.S.*, 31 July 1885; The Duagh branch claimed that since its inception the branch received two £30 cheques for evicted tenants despite only subscribing a fraction of that amount to the Central Branch, see *K.W.R.*, 25 July 1885.

²⁰⁵ *K.S.*, 30 June 1885.

²⁰⁶ *K.S.*, 3 July 1885.

²⁰⁷ *K.S.*, 11 Aug. 1885.

²⁰⁸ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly report, 1 Aug. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1885).

²⁰⁹ Bishop Higgins to Dean Coffey, 20 June 1885 (KDRK, Parish Correspondence/ St Johns, Tralee, letter number 6)

they pleased.²¹⁰ At the next meeting of the league, which had a 'crowded attendance', Irwin demonstrated the qualities that his superiors believed made him ideal for the position of parish priest in the volatile district. A letter from the Tralee League was read seeking support in its position against the Central Branch. Although the branch had previously passed resolutions in favour of the Tralee League, Irwin heavily criticised Harrington's expulsion and refused to allow any further communication with the dissolved branch. Irwin also condemned excessive boycotting and refused to sanction a proposed resolution supporting the candidature in an election for the position of dispensary doctor. The militant members of the league were enraged and 'a rather discreditable scene followed' leading to the meeting ending in confusion.²¹¹ Although not mentioned in the newspapers, the R.I.C. County Inspector reported that Irwin was assaulted by 'a member named Quinlan who is an infidel and a reputed dynamiter'.²¹² Quinlan was a known radical and was widely suspected of orchestrating agrarian intimidation and violence.²¹³ Despite Irwin's difficulties, he achieved a degree of influence over the branch and prevented the radical elements from dominating its proceedings. By early September Davis believed: 'boycotting has received a check by the appointment of Archdeacon Irwin'.²¹⁴

Although the Tralee Leaguers continued to meet on a weekly basis, the branch's prospects of success had significantly lessened. With the general election looming, leaders of radical Nationalism began to offer their full support to Parnell. Michael Davitt settled any ambiguity over his political stance and gave his full backing to Parnell when he stated in late August 1885 at a demonstration in Longford: 'I declare that there is only one parliamentary policy in Ireland, and that is the policy of Mr. Parnell'.²¹⁵ During this period other noted Fenian leaders also gave their support to Parnell. In Mullinahone, county Tipperary, John O'Leary, while giving a speech over the grave of Charles Kickham to commemorate the third anniversary of his death, declared that Parnell 'should now be allowed to decide when and how to take the fence' and that opposition to

²¹⁰ *K.S.*, 21 Aug. 1885.

²¹¹ *K.W.R.*, 29 Aug. 1885.

²¹² Report on Maurice Murphy, Castleisland (N.A.I., CSO RP 1885 19125).

²¹³ For a full analysis of Quinlan and the radicalism of the Castleisland League see ch. VI.

²¹⁴ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly report, 1 Sept. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP).

²¹⁵ *U.I.*, 22 Aug. 1885.

him was 'unworthy of patriotic men'.²¹⁶ Within a number of days the former I.R.B. leader for Cork city and recently elected M.P. for Tipperary, John O'Connor, visited Tralee and had a meeting with William Moore Stack. Since January 1885, O'Connor had become the chief instrument of the Irish Party in Munster to persuade other I.R.B. men to follow his example and join the Parnellites.²¹⁷ He successfully converted Moore Stack to Parnellism and outlined to him that if the officers of the branch resigned and a re-election occurred the Organising Committee would consider reinstating the branch.²¹⁸ At the next meeting of the league Moore Stack stated these conditions. He demonstrated his new conversion to Parnellism by condemning agrarian outrages. The members in attendance failed to offer a resolution to this effect, illustrating their continued radicalism. However, it was decided to adopt the initiatives proposed by O'Connor. Thomas O'Rourke depicted the influence Fenianism had over the Tralee Leaguers when he contended:

he thought it would be a very patriotic duty on their part to do so, looking at the pronouncement of Mr. Michael Davitt at Longford, the speech of John O'Leary over the grave of Charles Kickham and seeing the interview which the *Freeman* correspondent had with James Stephens... all of which tended towards one thing, the promotion of unity.²¹⁹

With such segments of Fenian leaders supporting the parliamentary effort for home rule, the Tralee Leaguers capitulated. The officers of the branch resigned and had a re-election. Fenians John Power and Maurice Moynihan were elected to leading positions and significantly Edward Harrington did not feature. The Central Branch refused to sanction this move. Another election was finally held and in September Edward Harrington was reappointed as president and the branch was officially recognised by the Central Branch.

The debacle within the Tralee League illustrated a number of factors influencing popular politics in the county. Within Tralee town, local Fenian figures were willing to challenge the Irish Party and constitutional Nationalism represented by Edward Harrington. The public's overwhelming support for the G.A.A. sports, which were orchestrated by these Fenian figures, demonstrated the scale of popularity these individuals had. Edward Harrington's continual support of the 'landlord' sports depicted

²¹⁶ Marcus Bourke, *John O'Leary: a study in Irish separatism* (Tralee, 1967), p. 175.

²¹⁷ Magee, *The I.R.B: the Irish republican brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Fein*, p. 138.

²¹⁸ *K.W.R.*, 29 Aug. 1885.

²¹⁹ *K.W.R.*, 5 Sept. 1885.

his underestimation of this popular sentiment. The subsequent divisions between the Central Branch of the league and the Tralee Leaguers had larger implications. A growing unrest was apparent amongst many Nationalists, including Michael Davitt, with the increasingly autocratic nature of the parliamentary party. The suppression of the Tralee branch added to these criticisms. Furthermore, the issue demonstrated the attempt by the leadership of the league to champion a centralised Nationalism against the claims of local organisations and personalities. This attempt to supersede the national over the local was probably the biggest obstacle to Parnellism and the National League. The failure of the league in the 1882-84 period, demonstrated the predominance of local issues and the general apathy amongst many to home rule. Davitt's criticisms of the league, which concentrated on its failure to adopt the proposed council of delegates and the constant focus on the return of M.P.s, astutely played on this danger. The ability of such local disquiet to develop into a broader competing movement was apparent. Michael Cusack's private and public pronouncements illustrated his willingness to defy the National League to protect the ever increasingly popular G.A.A. The Fenian undertones in Davitt's comments demonstrated another threat to the hegemony of the National League over Nationalist politics. Popular demonstrations for Fenianism and Fenian leaders were evident in 1884-85. These developments undoubtedly encouraged and gave confidence to the Tralee Leaguers in disposing Edward Harrington and replacing him with a publicly known Fenian, William Moore Stack. However, with the collapse of the government and the ever increasing prospects of a hung parliament further facilitating Parnell's ability to deliver home rule any political impetus behind anti-league influences was undermined. When the Tralee Leaguers capitulated to the Central Branch they cited the pronouncements by Davitt, O'Leary and Stephens, which supported Parnell, as influencing factors. The failure of the Fenian inspired Tralee Leaguers to garner any degree of popular support outside the Castleisland Branch demonstrated the limitations of the Fenian organisation in orchestrating political action. Although the leaders of the insurgency in Tralee were well known Fenians their sphere of influence over areas outside the town was cripplingly limited. The vast majority of branches either failed to comment on the issue or openly supported Edward Harrington. Even in regions where Fenians were active in branches, such as Killarney and Causeway, no concrete support

for the Tralee branch was forthcoming. The success of the central branch over the localised Fenian motivations of the Tralee League illustrated a degree of success for the transition in politics from the local concerns of the Land League, which frequently reflected the immediate circumstances of specific regions to the supplementation of such concerns by a wider 'national' politics.

Chapter V: The operation of the National League.

5.1: Introduction.

Throughout 1885 the leadership of the National League endeavoured to establish a countrywide structure of local branches to promote home rule and act as the electioneering machine of the Irish parliamentary party. As already highlighted in chapter IV the vital middle to large farmer class had little political appetite for this objective during 1882-4 and the movement was largely a failure in county Kerry. However, during 1885 this rapidly changed. The league went from being a defunct organisation to the most widespread and extensively organised political movement witnessed in nineteenth century Ireland. By the start of 1886 over sixty branches of the National League were in existence in Kerry and over 1,500 countrywide. This chapter concentrates on the political and agrarian circumstances surrounding the emergence of the movement. It also examines the local leadership of the National League and particularly highlights the paramount role of Catholic clergy and middle class groupings in the organisation. In turn, the chapter explores the influence these increasingly conservative figures had on the social and political objectives of the league at a local level. This is achieved by an in-depth analysis of the local activity of branches of the National League. Finally, the chapter examines the effects the mass mobilisation of the National League had on the development of Nationalism and the perceived idea of what an Irish 'nation' constituted.

5.2: The Land Question in 1885.

Central to the transformation of the league, and particularly the political reawakening of the tenant farmers, was not the topic of home rule but inevitably agrarian issues. The *raison d'être* for the new popularity of the National League in 1885 was the increased anxiety amongst tenant farmers over the on-going depression in the agricultural economy. A renewed agricultural depression began to take full effect on the rural community in 1885. The prices of both cattle and butter plunged at once in 1884 and 'no Irish agricultural export commodity was more affected by the downward plunge of prices

after 1883 than butter'.¹ International imports in butter from France, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries, undermined the traditional supremacy of Irish butter in the British market. This directly undermined the financial return farmers received for their butter. For example, a farmer with thirty dairy cows under the north Kerry land agent George Sandes, saw his return for eighty firkins of butter drop from £292 in 1883 to £247 in 1885.² Farmers within the county were largely dependent on butter as their main produce. Farmers were further financially squeezed with high county taxes, poor law rates and the taxes for extra police. One farmer from the Castleisland region, who had an annual rent of £64 for fifty acres, paid £17 for poor rates alone.³ The fall in the prices of agricultural produces in general, and butter in particular, compounded with the high taxation of tenants undermined the economic viability of the farming class. As early as March 1885 the R.I.C. District Inspector for Castleisland, Davis, warned: 'taxes are very high and the prices of all sorts of farm produce are low.... Most of the farmers around here are on the verge of bankruptcy'.⁴ By August he feared the worst when he reported:

the condition of the county is far from promising just now and all classes are in such a bad financial plight that I fear it will be a long time [until] they are in working order... I have it from a good number of the largest most intelligent and hardworking farmers in the district that they cannot hold out if matters do not improve.⁵

The precarious financial position of the agricultural economy undermined the gains tenants had accrued through rent reductions from the Land Commission.

Despite the increased anxiety in the rural economy, no anti-rent combinations or systematic rent strikes had yet to emerge by August 1885. However, for a number of months it was apparent that a renewed clash with landlordism over rent was strongly in the minds of league organisers. As early as April 1885 the Tralee branch warned landlords not to demand rents from tenants.⁶ In June the branch sent a circular to all the

¹ J.S. Donnelly, *The land and people of nineteenth-century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975), p 308.

² *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act, 1881 and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 1885: minutes of evidence, and appendix*, p. 536, H.C. 1887, xxvi, 25 (hereafter *Cowper commission: evidence*).

³ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 540.

⁴ South Western Division: monthly report, Mar. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1885 7273).

⁵ South Western Division: monthly report, Aug. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887, box 3310). In this box there is a full set R.I.C. police reports for county Kerry for the period of Aug. 1885-July 1886.

⁶ *K.S.*, 14 Apr. 1885.

other league branches in the county calling on them to 'consider... some feasible means of averting the extraction from [tenants] of impossible rents'.⁷ A leading member of the branch, Thomas O'Rourke, radically advocated that tenants not pay any rent due to the depression in agricultural prices.⁸ In June, the Barrowduff National League in the Killarney region urged farmers to first look after themselves and their families, and then pay their landlords. Evoking the 'unwritten law', farmers were informed during the meeting that 'we have natural rights and claims to live in our native soil and they [landlords] want to exterminate us'.⁹ Anxiety over the deepening crisis in agricultural prices appeared to be a primary motivation behind the emergence of the National League at a local level during much of 1885.

The agrarianism of the local branches of the National League contradicted the official policy of the movement, which promoted home rule as its primary objective. Although the leadership of the movement did promote land reform, it was a distant second to home rule in importance in the National League's official programme. This was demonstrated in June 1885 when Timothy Harrington (acting as secretary to the central branch) attempted to discourage any potential agrarian agitation and informed local branches that the new league would not dispense funds to evicted tenants as the Land League did. He wrote in a public letter that the league would not wholly discard the claims of evicted tenants but 'when the league was established it was purely and simply as a political organisation, and the relief of evicted tenants had no place in its programme'. He stated that the high cost of the registration of voters undermined the league's ability to fund evicted tenants.¹⁰ At the level of high politics, Parnell was at this stage preoccupied with *politicking* for home rule with members of the newly appointed Tory caretaker government. Any renewed agrarian agitation had portentous consequences for the newly established, although largely informal, alliance achieved by Parnell with the Conservatives.¹¹ In the summer of 1885, despite the realities of the worsening agricultural

⁷ K.S., 16 June 1885.

⁸ K.S., 16 June 1885.

⁹ K.S., 16 June 1885.

¹⁰ U.I., 6 June 1885.

¹¹ R.V. Comerford, 'The Parnell era, 1883-91' in W.E. Vaughan, (ed.) *A new history of Ireland, V: Ireland under the union, II, 1870-1911* (Oxford, 1996), pp 59-61; Alan O'Day, *Parnell and the first home rule episode* (Dublin, 1986), pp 56-80.

economy and the simmering tensions in rural society, there remained no impetus from the leadership of the national movement for an agrarian agitation.

Similarly, at a local level some influences within the league attempted to prevent agrarianism from dominating the movement within Kerry. Edward Harrington, reflecting the objectives of the national leadership, frequently attempted to concentrate on home rule when organising the National League at public demonstrations in the county. After being pressed by members of a crowd during a league rally in Lixnaw in May 1885, to condemn land grabbing he refused to dwell on the topic and continued his speech, which spoke of the 'dawning daylight of Irish independence'.¹² Furthermore, the widespread presence of the clergy in the new league led to a more conservative element, which attempted to curtail the excesses of potential agitation. At the inaugural meeting of the league in Dingle during May, the chairman, Canon O'Sullivan clashed with a Tralee Leaguer who attempted to criticise recent evictions on Lord Ventry's estate. Canon O'Sullivan commented that the evictions were not unjust and only took place where six or seven years rent were due and that Ventry 'is always ready to do justice'. Thomas O'Rourke, an established agrarian agitator from Tralee, replied that they should 'uproot landlordism root and branch'.¹³ When Archdeacon Irwin was appointed to the Castleisland parish in August 1885 he succeeded in diluting radical elements in the local branch of the league. During the first meeting he presided over he condemned excessive boycotting and prevented a radical resolution condemning the National League executive's role in suppressing the Tralee League being passed.¹⁴ While agrarianism formulated much local league activity and tensions concerning rent payment had developed; the lack of any initiative from the national leadership and the conservative nature of much of the local clerical leadership appeared to undermine any potential agrarian agitation.

Parnell's policy of concentrating the National League on the issue of home rule over the land question was jeopardised with the passing of a land act in August 1885. During the period since the 1881 Land Act, it became increasingly evident that the setting of judicial rents was not the panacea for landlord-tenant problems. With landlord

¹² *K.S.*, 26 May 1885.

¹³ *K.S.*, 8 May 1885.

denunciations of the judicial reductions of rents on one hand, and tenant dissatisfaction with their inadequacy on the other, many began to see tenant proprietorship as the solution to the land question.¹⁵ In response to this situation the Troy caretaker government introduced a new act in August 1885. Under the legislation better terms were offered to tenants to promote the sale of land from landlords to tenants.¹⁶ Easier terms of purchase were offered to tenants and the government provided £5,000,000 credit for tenants to buy their holdings. Popularly known as the Ashbourne Act, the legislation attempted to overcome the defects of the purchase clauses of the 1881 Land Act. Although the radical Land League cry of compulsory purchase was set aside, the legislation appealed to many National Leaguers.¹⁷ Editorial comment in *United Ireland* claimed the Land League goal of tenant ownership had been obtained under the Act. The National League newspaper declared:

the Land League principle of making the tiller the owner of the soil... has been legislatively admitted, there is room for no other dispute amongst Land Leaguers except as to the price at which the transfer of property is to take place. This as we have shown, is not a matter of principle but of detail, and can be discussed without passion.¹⁸

The comments illustrated the eagerness of the editors of the newspaper to quell any potential agitation. By claiming that the Land League objective of peasant proprietorship was achieved and that the remaining details were issues without 'principle' and 'passion', the newspaper was clearly advocating a moderate reaction to the act. However, the newspaper did contend that some form of organisation orchestrated by the league was necessary and stated:

it is open to the tenants to make their own market for their holdings, and by a little combination and forethought they can regulate the price to the pocket [and] the number of years purchase to be given on any estate must come up for discussion in the local branches of the league everywhere.¹⁹

The newspaper's reaction to the act reflected an increasing schism within the Nationalist

¹⁴ *K.W.R.*, 29 Aug. 1885.

¹⁵ Frank Thompson, *The end of liberal Ulster: land agitation and land reform, 1868-86* (Belfast, 2001), pp 273-74.

¹⁶ *Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 1885*, 48 & 49 Vict., c. 73.

¹⁷ Alvin Jackson, *Home rule: an Irish history, 1800-2000* (London, 2003), p. 56.

¹⁸ *U.I.*, 15 Aug. 1885.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

movement over the legislation and the emerging potential for rural unrest. Parnell initially failed to recognise the increased significance of the agrarian situation and continued to concentrate largely on home rule.²⁰ Similarly when William O'Brien, T.M. Healy and Justin McCarthy addressed a meeting in Cork on 14 August little or no comment was made on the land question.²¹ However, serious criticism from the agrarian left emerged. In early August Davitt stated at Ardboe, county Tyrone, that the land purchase act had 'for its object the robbing of the public purse and of the tenant farmers, in order to pay the debts of bankrupt landlords' and branded it a 'landlord relief bill'.²² Within a week, Jeremiah Jordan, soon to be Parnellite M.P., pronounced against purchase in much the same vein as had Davitt.²³

The introduction of the act had the effect of providing an immediate injection of agrarianism into the Nationalist movement in a period when the emphasis from Parnell and his leadership was fully focused on preparing for the forthcoming general election and the ultimate objective of home rule. Although throughout the summer of 1885 the economic depression was forcing agrarianism at a local level, this was not reflected in the actions of the leadership of the National League. The introduction of the new legislation transformed the direction of the Nationalist movement. While some form of agitation against the payment of rent to the customary November gale was inevitable due to the depressed agricultural economy, the situation was irrevocably altered with the passing of the act. Now the demand and resistance of rent was inextricably linked with the much larger and significant issue of purchase. With the commonly held Irish Nationalist goal of tenant proprietorship apparently on the horizon, attention sharply shifted towards the land question. The more moderate and constitutional minded Parnellites began concentrating on the issue. In mid-August John Redmond promoted tenant combination at Castleblayney, when he advised tenants to be patient and if 'they waited they would get the land for half what they would have to pay for it if they rushed into the snare in too great a hurry'.²⁴ At Gorey, county Wexford, William O'Brien, promoted National League involvement in potential agrarian agitation when he stated: 'I see no reason why the

²⁰ O'Day, *Parnell and the first home rule episode*, p. 82.

²¹ *U.I.*, 15 Aug. 1885.

²² *U.I.*, 8 Aug. 1885.

²³ O'Day, *Parnell and the first home rule episode*, p. 82.

branches in their districts should not meet and fix the minimum number of years purchase on the valuation... and I see no reason why they should not boycott anyone who went beyond that figure as a land grabber of the worst stamp'.²⁵ Parnell, continuing his political dexterity from the Land League period when he 'had to identify himself (at least superficially) with the pre-eminent cause' within the movement, realigned his policy.²⁶ He quickly reaffirmed the agrarianism of the movement and promoted anti-rent combinations. At the end of August he stated:

I trust that the example of the settlement that the Tottenham tenants and other tenants have obtained by standing together in a body will instruct the rest of the Irish tenantry and that they will come forward suitably at the commencement of the winter, and subscribe to the funds of the league, which are mainly used for the relief of evicted tenants.²⁷

His reference that National League money would fund evicted tenants contradicted Timothy Harrington's statement the previous June, which emphasised that the majority of league funds would concentrate on registration expenses. Harrington also adopted the new found agrarianism of the leadership of the movement when he boasted that forty-seven evicted tenants on the Tottenham estate were supported by the National League over the previous four years at a total cost of £4,859.²⁸

In late August 1885, the recrudescence of anti-rent combinations, with support from the national leadership, was compounded in Kerry with a large demonstration in Killarney. Over 10,000 attended the meeting, which was addressed by both T.M. Healy and William O'Brien along with the president of the Killarney National League, J.D. Sheehan. Healy and O'Brien were the most prominent national figures to attend a political demonstration in the county in a number of years. Healy, long associated as one of the most constitutionally minded of all the Parnellite M.P.s, gave an extremely radical agrarian speech laced with vituperation towards landlords. After condemning individuals who were grazing on evicted land on the earl of Kenmare's estate he stated:

in no part of Ireland was landlordism so odious as in Kerry. We will expedite the departure of vultures and harpies from this district... Our object is that you

²⁴ *U.I.*, 15 Aug. 1885.

²⁵ *U.I.*, 29 Aug. 1885.

²⁶ Jackson, *Home rule*, p. 51.

²⁷ *K.S.*, 28 Aug. 1885.

²⁸ *UI*, 29 Aug. 1885

should be secure in your holdings without having to pay any rent. My experience of the Land League times is that rich farmers are to be distrusted. They sneaked into the office, and paid behind backs. Now my advice to you would be, if you enter into a combination, to take proper precautions that no man breaks the line. Bank your rents in the name of trustees, and say we will demand a reduction and stand by it.²⁹

He went on to condemn violent outrage and called on the people to utilise boycotting to enforce the rent strike. He also deemed that no tenant should purchase under the Ashbourne Act without consulting the local branch of the National League.³⁰ Healy's comments clearly advocated rent strikes in extreme and violent agrarian rhetoric.³¹ His advice on banking rents until the strike was successful, foreshadowed the future agrarian agitation announced in October 1886 in the form of the Plan of Campaign.³² His words condoned a renewal of agrarian agitation against the payment of rent and to lower the purchase price of holdings. This agitation was to be orchestrated by local branches of the National League. Although references and resolutions to home rule were passed and William O'Brien concentrated his speech on criticism of the government, the tone of the meeting was agrarian. The pliability of the leadership of the movement to seemingly switch the emphasis from home rule during such a vital stage of the election campaign, demonstrated that agrarianism remained the dominant issue at a local level. As a corollary to the local realities of on-going economic distress and the significance of the new purchase act, the league leadership dispelled their previous recalcitrance to agrarian agitation. With the leaders of the parliamentary party and the local branches of the league advocating a renewed agitation, turbulence and discontent was inevitably going to mark

²⁹ This section of the speech was highlighted in the opening address of the attorney general at the Special Commission in 1888. See, *Special commission act, reprint of the shorthand notes of the speeches, proceedings, and evidence taken before the commissioners appointed under the above act, vol. i* (London, 1890), p. 277.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ It has been posited by Healy's modern day biographer, Frank Callanan, that Healy used such extreme language in promoting a proprietorial solution to the land question to surpass the left. Callanan terms this as the 'agrarianism of the right', for a full analysis of Healy's opinions on the land question see Frank Callanan, *T.M. Healy* (Cork, 1996), pp 107-13.

³² Healy, William O'Brien and by October 1885, John Dillon seemed determined to promote this form of agitation. Within a number of weeks. Healy advised tenants in county Monaghan to bank rents in a 'war chest' to fight landlords and advised that such methods should be adopted nationally. In October John Dillon, marking his return to the political scene, completely ignored home rule and promoted the idea of banking rents as did O'Brien in the pages of *United Ireland*, see L.M. Geary, *The Plan of Campaign 1886-91* (Cork, 1986), p. 8; F.S.L. Lyons, *John Dillon, a biography* (London, 1968), pp 74-75.

the forthcoming winter.

The injection of agrarianism from the Nationalist leadership compounded the emergence of agitation within the county. In turn, tenants combined and sought large reductions from their landlords. At a meeting of the Ballyheigue branch of the National League during September, tenants on the Busted estate were told to seek a thirty-five percent abatement in rent. During the same meeting, tenants on Colonel James Crosbie's 13,422 acres estate decided to demand a twenty-five percent reduction.³³ Following on the direction of the league, tenants led by the parish priest, Fr McCarthy, who was also the president of the branch, went to Crosbie and demanded a twenty-five percent reduction.³⁴ Similarly tenants on an estate managed by George Trench threatened a 'solid strike... against the payment of rent unless [granted] an abatement of forty percent'.³⁵ In Ardferf, tenants of Lord Listowel came together at a meeting of the local branch of the National League where 'they debated... their claim to a respectable reduction...[and] they agreed to demand a reduction of twenty-five per cent'.³⁶ In nearby Causeway, tenants of Captain Oliver's (1,369 acres estate) embarked on a rent strike after being refused a request for a twenty-five percent abatement.³⁷ Similarly, tenants on Sir Edward Denny's 21,479-acre estate near Tralee sought a thirty-percent abatement in rent.³⁸ Encouraged and organised by local branches of the National League a general abatement of rent was sought on a large number of estates in the county in the autumn of 1885.

The landlord reaction to the tenants' demands varied. Some of the smaller landowners granted reductions. On William Pope's 821 acres estate in Ballyheigue a thirty percent reduction was granted to the tenants.³⁹ In the Castleisland region Catherine Clotsman (2,016 acres estate) gave her tenants a twenty-five percent reduction.⁴⁰ Another small landlord in the same region, Captain Fagan (840 acres estate) offered his tenants a sizeable forty percent reduction.⁴¹ Some larger landlords also significantly reduced the

³³ *K.S.*, 8 Sept. 1885; *Land owners in Ireland, 1876* (Baltimore, 1988), p. 141.

³⁴ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 497; *K.S.*, 18 Sept. 1885.

³⁵ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 502.

³⁶ *K.S.*, 4 Sept. 1885; Lord Listowel owned 25,964 acres in the northern half of the county, see *Land owners*, p. 143.

³⁷ *Land owners*, p. 145; *K.W.R.*, 19 Sept. 1885

³⁸ Denny was an absentee landlord with an address in London, *Land owners*, p. 142; *K.S.*, 23 Oct. 1885.

³⁹ *Land owners*, p. 144; *K.W.R.*, 19 Sept. 1885.

⁴⁰ *Land owners*, p. 141; *K.W.R.*, 26 Sept. 1885.

⁴¹ *Land owners*, p. 142; *K.W.R.*, 31 Oct. 1885.

rent of their tenants. On the 94,983 acres Lansdowne estate in Kenmare a thousand tenants reportedly marched to seek reductions.⁴² The agent, Townsend Trench, offered terms of reduction that the tenants satisfactorily accepted.⁴³ However, landlord-tenant relations on these estates were benign and were not the centre of previous agrarian disturbance. Such magnanimity was non-existent in other regions. With the prospect of abatements reducing any potential purchase price under the Ashbourne Act, coupled with previous landlord losses experienced through the land courts and Arrears Act, many landowners were determined to withstand tenants' demands. James Crosbie of Ballyheigue refused a reduction on the grounds that he had fixed a judicial rent with two-thirds of his tenantry in 1882.⁴⁴ Furthermore, in north Kerry landlords had combined to resist demands for reductions, as revealed when Wilson Gunn informed his tenants 'that he with the other landlords in the adjoining properties were bound by combination not to give their tenants one penny reduction'.⁴⁵ In the perpetually disturbed Castleisland region the majority of landlords flatly refused any abatement in rents.⁴⁶ Many landlords were heavily in debt and unable to grant reductions.⁴⁷ This was particularly evident in the Killarney area where the two major estates of the earl of Kenmare (91,080 acres) and H.A. Herbert of Muckcross (47,238 acres) were out of the control of the landlords and in the hands of trustees.⁴⁸ In early October 1885 three hundred tenants sought a thirty percent rent reduction from Kenmare. The earl, sequestered in his stately Killarney House, offered his sympathy to the tenants but stated he had no ability to reduce their rents. In 1882 the estate was £227,000 in debt to Standard Life Assurance Company (mortgage body) which placed the property under the control of four trustees, who in 1885 refused to reduce rents.⁴⁹ The Herbert estate was in a similar financial predicament

⁴² *Land owners*, p. 143.

⁴³ *K.W.R.*, 14 Nov. 1885.

⁴⁴ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 502.

⁴⁵ *K.S.*, 2 Oct. 1885.

⁴⁶ *K.W.R.*, 31 Oct. 1885.

⁴⁷ For an analysis of landlord debt during the period see, L.P., Curtis, jr., 'Encumbered wealth: landlord indebtedness in post-Famine Ireland' in *American Historical Review*, no. 85 (Apr., 1980), pp 332-67; Terence Dooley, *The decline of the big house in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860-1960* (Dublin, 2001), pp 79-111.

⁴⁸ *Land owners*, p. 142-43.

⁴⁹ Since 1882 the estate was in the hands of a trustee body representing the mortgage company Standard Assurance Company, see J.S. Donnelly, 'The Kenmare estates during the nineteenth century: part II' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 22, 1989, pp 81-95.

and the trustees of the property also refused any reduction.⁵⁰

The issue of rent payment was further complicated by the looming emergence of purchase. Under the terms of the Ashbourne Act it was recommended that tenants purchase their holdings that amounted to a price of between seventeen and twenty years of their rent (under the Act the government advanced the whole of the purchase money to tenants to be repaid over forty-nine years at four per cent interest).⁵¹ As already noted tenants were advised by Nationalist leaders to wait and combine through branches of the National League to achieve lower purchase prices. In turn landlords and agents appeared anxious to push the sale of holdings at prices that were invariably unacceptable to tenants. The increasingly insolvent Sir Rowland Blennerhassett of Killorglin (8,390 acres estate) offered his tenants purchase of their holdings less ten percent of their current rents.⁵² They refused and continued their demand for a thirty percent reduction. On the Hickson lands in Causeway the land agent, Samuel Hussey, offered a twenty percent temporary reduction if tenants bought their holdings at a purchase rate of twenty years, which they promptly refused. In the Castleisland area a small landlord named Richard Meredith (1,839 acres estate) refused any reduction but offered his tenants purchase of their holdings at twenty years at a price that amounted to twenty-five percent above Griffith's valuation.⁵³ The tenants responded by demanding purchase at Griffith's valuation only (interestingly while during the Land League period Griffith's valuation was widely seen as a 'fair' rent, by 1885 many tenants saw it as a 'fair' purchase price).⁵⁴ In Abbeydorney, tenants of Hurley were offered purchase of their holdings at twenty years. They refused and instead demanded purchase at fifteen years.⁵⁵ Tenants were encouraged by a general belief that better terms would be achieved through combination. This was compounded by the popular opinion that purchase legislation was still in a nascent state and that further incentives to purchase were likely. The Cowper

⁵⁰ *K.S.*, 2 Oct. 1885.

⁵¹ Thompson, *The end of liberal Ulster*, p. 292.

⁵² *Land owners*, p. 141; Blennerhassett was one of a number of landlords who held their estates under perpetuity from Trinity College, Dublin. He was in precarious financial position and owed up to £18,000 to mortgage companies, see R.B. MacCarthy, *The Trinity College estates, 1800-1923: corporate management in an age of reform* (Dundalk, 1992), p. 175.

⁵³ *Land owners*, p. 143.

⁵⁴ *K.W.R.*, 31 Oct. 1885.

⁵⁵ *K.S.*, 27 Oct. 1885.

Commission reported: 'so much has been already gained for the tenants that most of them are easily led to believe that, by waiting, they may get more. They are said to be advised by the Nationalist party to take this course'.⁵⁶ The land agent Townsend Trench told the same commission that the land legislation of 1881 and 1885 'have created expectations that still further advantages could be obtained by continued agitation and by the spread of an organisation for resistance to the payment of rent'.⁵⁷ In September 1885 the District Inspector for Castleisland, Davis, described the motivations of the impending agitation as:

the people believe that the land question is but in a transition state, and that at any moment a fresh resistance to present rents may become advisable. This feeling is evidenced in the first place by the frequent and almost general refusal on their part to accept the terms (generally about twenty years) on which landlords have offered to sell farms and in the second by the readiness with which they seem disposed to grasp the excuse afforded by the present rather adverse season, in order to demand considerable reduction on even judicial rents.⁵⁸

With the finality of purchase apparently not far from the minds of tenants and landlords a renewed agitation was inevitable. When landlords and their agents refused reductions, the advice of T.M. Healy was heeded and rents were lodged with tenant representatives as defence funds. In Ballyheigue the local league established a defence fund to protect tenants against eviction. Similarly in Ballydonoghue the branch of the National League called on all members to pay 6s in the pound on the valuation of their farms so as 'to protect any tenant or tenants who may be put to their costs by their landlord'. Two members of the league were appointed to each townland for the purpose of collection.⁵⁹ After Samuel Hussey refused abatements to the earl of Kenmare's tenantry, a defence fund was established and rents were lodged with trustees of the tenants. Within a number of weeks £850 of tenants rent was in the hands of the parish priest of Firies and president of the local league, Father O'Connor.⁶⁰ Landlords retaliated by re-adopting tactics implemented during the land war. As early as September the

⁵⁶ *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act, 1881, and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act, 1885*, p. 9 [C 4059], H.C. 1887, xxvi, I.

⁵⁷ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 473.

⁵⁸ South Western Division: D.Is' monthly report, Sept. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310).

⁵⁹ *K.S.*, 2 Oct. 1885.

⁶⁰ *K.S.*, 24 Nov. 1885.

largest tenants on Captain Oliver's estate were served with writs for eviction.⁶¹ Tenants to a man were reportedly served with writs on a number of estates in Castleisland.⁶² On the Kenmare estates forty of the largest tenants were served with writs.⁶³ In all 391 writs were issued for rent in the county during 1885, a significant increase on the 235 issued during the previous year.⁶⁴ Within a number of weeks cattle from a number of tenants on the estate were seized for rent by decree. In a scene reminiscent of the land war the cattle were put to public auction. The National League counter-demonstrated the sale and J.D. Sheehan, acting as the league representative, bid against an emergency man and bought in the stock for the tenants.⁶⁵ In another tactic revived from the land war era, tenants in Duagh had the interest in their holdings sold by the landlord to recover rent.⁶⁶ The Property Defence Association re-emerged and in October 'proposed to offer help to boycotted farmers, landowners, traders and others by arranging sales of stock, hay, and all kinds of farm produce'.⁶⁷

By the late autumn of 1885 a renewed agrarian agitation was under way in Kerry and large parts of Ireland. Although some landlords willingly reduced rents to a level acceptable by tenants, many refused any abatement. Landlords were anxious to avoid further financial losses after the reductions in many rents in the land courts and the wiping away of rent arrears. On certain estates, such as the earl of Kenmare's, landlords were so in-debt that they were unable to help their tenants. The situation was further complicated by the implications of the Ashbourne Act, as landlords and tenants both attempted to influence the purchase price of holdings. By late 1885 the land question remained as intractable as ever. Central to the emergence of rent strikes was the role of local branches of the National League. Local leagues organised tenants, advised them on what reductions to seek and orchestrated defence funds. Despite the constitutional objectives of the leadership of the league, agrarian issues dominated the emergence of the movement at

⁶¹ *K.W.R.*, 19 Sept. 1885.

⁶² *K.W.R.*, 31 Oct. 1885.

⁶³ *K.W.R.*, 24 Oct. 1885.

⁶⁴ *Returns for Clare, Cork, Kerry, Galway and Mayo of number of civil bills entered at quarter sessions in ejectment on title for non-payment of rent, or overholding, 1879-88*, p. 4, H.C. 1889 (211), lxi, 417.

⁶⁵ *K.W.R.*, 14 Nov. 1885.

⁶⁶ Outrage report: burning of crops belonging to Foster Fitzgerald, Sept. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1885 17636). Fitzgerald's crops were burnt in retaliation for selling the interest in a number of holdings.

⁶⁷ Report on Property Defence Association, 18 Oct. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1885 19248/ 18946).

a local level.

5.3: The Catholic church and politics at a local level.

Although the National League developed as a result of agrarian issues, the movement at a national level failed to become embroiled in the radicalism that surrounded the emergence of the Land League. The radical Land League call for the abolition of landlordism was replaced with essentially moderate demands for a lower rent and purchase price. Since the emergence of the National League in 1882 Parnell attempted to reform the movement by isolating radical and Fenian influences. The role of the Catholic clergy was seen as paramount by the league's leadership in bringing about moderation in the movement. The explicit endorsement of Catholicism by Parnell led to the Catholic bishops agreeing to accept the Irish Party as their sole parliamentary representatives on the education issue in 1884.⁶⁸ This formal alliance at the level of high politics between church and party had profound effects on the National League movement at a local level. It effectively compounded the power and position of not just the Catholic clergy but also the moderate 'respectable classes' in local branches of the league. It also ensured the confessional nature of the movement

Within Kerry the issue of Catholic clerical involvement in popular Nationalist politics had long been a source of contention. The Catholic clergy were far from a homogenous group. A certain section of the priesthood had a long history of involvement in agrarian and Nationalist organisations. Figures such as Father Denis O'Donoghue, parish priest of Ardfert, were centrally involved in tenant politics over the previous thirty years. Ordained from Maynooth in 1850, O'Donoghue initially became involved in politics in the Millstreet parish in 1853 when he supported Alex McCarthy on 'the principle of Independent Opposition'.⁶⁹ While a curate in Dingle in 1865 he went to Tralee to support The O'Donoghue in an election to the town's borough constituency. The parish priest of the town, Fr Mawe, supported the opposing candidate, J.N. McKenna, and Fr O'Donoghue was forced to leave the town on 'pain of suspension from

⁶⁸ This process is fully examined in Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the Irish State, 1878-86* (Dublin, 1975).

⁶⁹ P.J. Hamel, *Maynooth: students and ordinations, index 1795-1895* (Maynooth, 1982), p. 138.

the bishop'.⁷⁰ During the 1872 by-election he marched his parishioners into Listowel to vote for the home rule candidate, Rowland Blennerhassett.⁷¹ Furthermore, he openly broke diocesan rules when he nominated Blennerhassett for election at the hustings in Tralee on 6 February 1872. A number of days previous to this, the bishop, Moriarty sent a circular to all his clergy specifically forbidding them from attending the nominations.⁷² He was also prominent in the establishment of the Land League and spoke at one of its initial meetings in Abbeydorney, which adjoined his parish.⁷³ By 1885 he was president of the Ardfert branch of the National League and helped to organise rent strikes on a number of properties in the region.⁷⁴ Other priests had similar backgrounds in politics and agrarianism. The parish priest of Ballybunnion, Mortimer O'Connor was politicised from a young age, when as a six year old he witnessed his father's arrest for involvement in the Tithe agitation.⁷⁵ Ordained in 1851 from Maynooth he came to national prominence in the 1870s when he led tenants in an attempt to buy the Harnec estate.⁷⁶ He was involved in the early stages of the Land League movement and attended the Land Convention of April 1880, which founded the Irish National Land League in the Rotunda.⁷⁷ By 1885 he presided over the Ballybunnion branch of the National League.⁷⁸ Both O'Donoghue and O'Connor were typical of a section of the Catholic clergy at a local level who had experience of politics since the 1850s and remained active by the time the National League emerged in 1885.

⁷⁰ Denis O'Donoghue/ Biographical notes (Kerry Diocesan Records, Killarney, Priests Papers). Both candidates were liberals with The O'Donoghue winning the contest by 115 votes to seventy-nine, see B.M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1921* (Dublin, 1978), p. 315. For a comprehensive account of politics in this period and particularly on the issue of 'Independent opposition' and The O'Donoghue's role in national political activity see, R.V. Comerford, 'Churchmen, tenants, and Independent opposition, 1850-56' in *A new history of Ireland, V, Ireland under the Union, I 1801-1870*, (ed.) W.E. Vaughan, (Oxford, 1989), pp 396-414.

⁷¹ J.A. Gaughan, *Listowel and its vicinity* (Cork, 1973). p. 105.

⁷² For an account of this see, Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the home rule movement in Ireland, 1870-74* (Dublin, 1990), pp 117-21.

⁷³ *K.S.*, 17 Dec. 1880.

⁷⁴ *K.S.*, 25 Aug. 1885.

⁷⁵ M.F. Cusack, *The case of Ireland stated* (Dublin, 1881).

⁷⁶ Pádraig De Brun, 'Kerry Diocese in 1890: Bishop Coffey's Survey' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 22 (1989), p. 110; Bryan MacMahon, 'George Sandes of Listowel: land agent, magistrate and terror of north Kerry' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, series 2, vol. 3, 2003.

⁷⁷ *K.S.*, 30 Apr. 1880.

⁷⁸ *K.S.*, 2 Oct. 1885.

Although some Catholic clerics had a long involvement in tenant politics, a significant number of clerical figures were circumspect to become involved in the potential radicalism of the land and national movements. Although priests presided over a large number of the branches of the National League in the county their influence and enthusiasm for the movement varied greatly. In 1888 a curate from Ballybunnion, Fr Godley, commenting on the National League movement, stated that 'the parish priests were allowed to take part, but the parish priests of Kerry have not much of the Nationalist in them.... They are old Whigs and have much of the fossil in them'.⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, significant differences existed within the priesthood. Samuel Hussey believed that the older priests were superior and 'drawn from a better class, because having to be educated at Rome or, at least, as far away as St Omer, entailed some considerable outlay by their relative'.⁸⁰ Indeed, tensions were apparent within the Catholic clergy in the county since the 1870s, particularly between the lower and higher clergy in the diocese. During the 1872 by-election political divisions surfaced in the clergy when a large number of the priesthood openly defied the Catholic hierarchy and bishop to successfully organise the election of the Protestant home ruler, Rowland Blennerhassett. The bishop, Moriarty, aligned with the county's gentry, attempted to elect a landlord orientated liberal Catholic nominee named John Dease. In direct opposition to the hierarchy much of the lower clergy refused to support the bishop's candidate who ultimately lost the election and openly supported Blennerhassett.⁸¹ The election not only highlighted divisions within the clergy in the county but also demonstrated that many within the Catholic Church, and particularly, the hierarchy had little political influence over the largely tenant electorate.

By the emergence of the Land League these divisions were still apparent. In 1881, the dean of the diocese, Higgins, was appointed as bishop. He had played a leading role in Dease's campaign in 1872 and by the time of the outbreak of the land war he was opposed to the Land League. In December 1880 a deputation from the Land League in Tralee town asked him to chair a public meeting that reportedly Parnell was to attend. He refused, stating that the people were competent to do it themselves and insinuated he

⁷⁹ *Special commission ... vol. viii*, p. 578.

⁸⁰ S.M. Hussey, *Reminiscences of an Irish land agent* (London, 1904), p. 116.

would refuse other priests permission to attend.⁸² His appointment in 1881 was greatly influenced by the British foreign office, who informed the Vatican during the candidature for the position that Higgins was as an opponent of the Land League and more preferable than his main opponent, Archdeacon O'Sullivan who was described as a 'man of extreme views'.⁸³ Throughout the first half of the 1880s the hierarchy of the Catholic Church failed to support the developing agrarian and Nationalist agitations. Furthermore, leading clerical figures frequently supported the government in the county as was demonstrated during the visits of Lord Spencer in September 1884 and the Prince of Wales in March 1885.⁸⁴

The hostility of the Catholic clerical hierarchy towards the land movement resulted in stringent diocesan rules restricting the involvement of priests in politics. For any priest to attend or address a political meeting in an outside parish, he had to receive permission from the sitting parish priest. This rule was in existence in the diocese since Bishop Moriarty's tenure but was formally adopted by all the dioceses in the country following a Synod in 1882.⁸⁵ Bishop Higgins also implemented regulations concerning the involvement of curates in politics. Curates were the youngest members of the clergy and were often considered to be more radical than the elder parish priests. Higgins ruled that any curate wishing to attend or speak at any political meeting had to receive permission directly from him. Introduced in 1882 this greatly curtailed the involvement of curates in the movement.⁸⁶ During the Land League period curates were very prominent in some of the most disturbed regions. In Ballyduff the president of the branch was a curate named Fr O'Sullivan.⁸⁷ Another curate, Fr Arthur Murphy, was central to the league in the highly volatile Castleisland region. He chaired meetings and during the

⁸¹ For a full account of this election see, Brendan O'Cathaoir, 'The Kerry "home rule" by-election, 1872' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 3 (1970), pp 154-70; Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the home rule movement in Ireland, 1870-74*, pp 113-21.

⁸² *K.S.*, 17 Dec. 1880.

⁸³ C.J. Woods, 'Ireland and Anglo-Papal relations, 1880-85' in *I.H.S.*, xvii, no. 69 (Mar., 1972), p. 30; Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the creation of the modern Irish state, 1878-86*, pp 143-4.

⁸⁴ See chapter IV.

⁸⁵ Address of the archbishops and bishops to the clergy of Ireland (confidential), 10 June 1882 (K.D.R., Killarney: Correspondence with hierarchy).

⁸⁶ *K.S.*, 10. Nov. 1885.

⁸⁷ *K.S.*, 8 Oct. 1880.

initial stages of the movement openly advocated boycotting.⁸⁸ In September 1881 he was reported as encouraging the use of violence and intimidation to enforce unity amongst striking tenants. He stated that some tenants were paying their rent 'by the back stairs' and asked was there 'no good night boys in the locality'.⁸⁹ In January 1881 a curate named Fr Kelliher was in court along with a number of leaguers for intimidating a farmer in the Waterville area.⁹⁰ During the Land League period curates were undoubtedly the most radical segment of the clergy. However, Higgins' appointment as bishop curtailed the activity of the clergy and particularly curates in popular politics.

These diocesan restrictions were particularly preponderant in the urban areas of Killarney and Tralee where the bishop and Dean Coffey were the respective parish priests.⁹¹ During the period of the Land and National League no cleric was a member or attended a branch meeting of the league in either of these towns. When the National League was established in 1882 Higgins failed to support the new organisation. The leading clerical agrarian from Furies, Fr Patrick O'Connor, stated that 'the bishop seemed to dissuade us... in the league, and I stepped back for some time without joining it'.⁹² By the start of 1885 the bishop was still attempting to undermine clerical involvement in the league. However, the emergence of the alliance between the Roman Catholic bishops and Parnell in 1884 placed the stance of the higher clergy in Kerry in jeopardy. The *Kerry Sentinel* frequently attacked the bishop for his continued alliance with the gentry and his intransigent animus towards the league. In March 1885, the newspaper stated: 'it is a grave and lamentable spectacle to see the bishop of this diocese... in such a position as that his words in public utterance carry no weight... and that he must be championed by the underlings of landlordism' and the editorial called for the 'neutrality of his lordship and the few clergy of this diocese who do not see their way to be with the people'.⁹³ Whatever criticisms the league leadership had of the bishop, they were eager to get the

⁸⁸ *K.S.*, 23 Nov. 1880. During this meeting he promoted the boycotting of a 'landgrabber' named Brown who failed to appear before the branch. He later negotiated a settlement with Brown to give up the piece of land he grabbed. Brown was given £15, the price he paid the landlord for the lease on the land, to give it up, see, *K.S.*, 21 Dec. 1880.

⁸⁹ *Special commission... vol. ii*, p. 335. 'Night boys' was a common phrase for moonlighters.

⁹⁰ *K.S.*, 25 Jan. 1881.

⁹¹ The position of dean was the second highest post in the Catholic diocese administration.

⁹² *Special Commission... vol. ix*, p. 55.

⁹³ *K.S.*, 27 Mar. 1885.

local clergy more involved in the movement. In June 1885 the *Kerry Sentinel's* editorial deemed: 'a political movement like this... requires tactical and prudent management as well as vigorous and energetic zeal to push it on', which the clergy would provide.⁹⁴ While the bishop could prevent curates from participating in politics little could be done to obstruct the role of parish priests, who could attend meetings within their own parishes without the need to seek permission. As the league grew during the latter half of 1885, the local clergy played a pivotal role and invariably were appointed the position of president at branch level. Despite this, the bishop and certain other Catholic clerical figures continued to prevent other clergy attending political meetings in their parishes (for a priest to attend a political meeting in another parish he had to receive the permission of the sitting parish priest). When T.M. Healy and William O'Brien spoke to over 10,000 demonstrators at Killarney in September 1885 no clerical figure was present.⁹⁵ Similarly, when William O'Brien returned to the county in October 1885 and spoke with Timothy Harrington at a 'monster' meeting in Listowel no clerical presence was permitted. The parish priest, Canon Davis, had previously refused to chair the meeting and permitted no other priest to attend.⁹⁶ The president of the Listowel branch of the National League was Fr D.R. Harrington (he was also the principal of St Michael's College secondary school.⁹⁷ He contended to the canon privately:

you have I understand definitely made up your mind not to attend the public meeting, I am sorry for this, and I am afraid you will yet recognise that you do not act wisely.... I may add that your absence from the public meeting will certainly excite a class of feeling, which every good Catholic would deplore.⁹⁸

Although prohibited from attending the meeting, Fr D.R. Harrington held a dinner for O'Brien and Harrington on the school grounds. During a speech he objected to the restrictions placed on him and other members of the clergy from attending the meeting. He stated:

the people missed the clergy from the National League platform at this day's meeting. I am aware also that the ecclesiastical discipline which accounts for the

⁹⁴ *K.S.*, 9 June 1885.

⁹⁵ *K.S.*, 1 Sept. 1885.

⁹⁶ *K.S.*, 4 Sept. 1885.

⁹⁷ Rev D.R. Harrington was a native of Castletownbere. He was also reputedly a relation of Timothy and Edward Harrington, see, Gaughan, *Listowel and its vicinity*, p. 109.

⁹⁸ Harrington to Davis, 12. Oct. 1885 (K.D.R., Killarney, Parish correspondence/ Listowel).

absence of the clergy. I must claim for a priest the right to have a conscience and liberty to obey it. If conscience does not allow a priest to be with his people in politics, I consider it intolerable tyranny to convert him by coercion.⁹⁹

Extensive pressure was exerted on the higher Catholic clergy to unshackle clerical participation in the National League. Both lay and clerical Nationalists publicly criticised the restrictions enforced by the bishop. The failure of the leading Catholic religious figures in the county to endorse any alignment with the National League was based on hostility towards home rule politics, which was apparent since the 1872 by-election. Despite the accord between Parnell and the Catholic bishops at a 'national' level, this hostility still formulated the Catholic clerical hierarchy's response to the National League in the county.

The advent of the National League's county convention for the selection of candidates to run in the general election in December 1885 forced the higher clergy to remove the restrictions on clerical involvement in the movement. Parnell had allocated a significant role for Catholic clergy at the conventions and they were allowed to attend and vote as *ex-officios*.¹⁰⁰ In turn, the bishop allowed the involvement of the clergy. The previously recalcitrant Dean Coffey of Tralee permitted the use of the building of the C.B.S. in the town to hold the convention in early November 1885. As parish priest of the town he also permitted other clergy to attend the meeting.¹⁰¹ During the same week the bishop announced that curates would only have to seek permission if they wished to speak at political meetings and were free to attend the convention.¹⁰² The convention was held in late November and fifty-two Catholic priests attended.¹⁰³ This was a critical development for politics within the county. Despite years of allegiance with liberal landlord orientated politics, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Kerry formalised its relationship with the parliamentary party and the local activists of the National League.

Of the fifty-two priests that attended the meeting twenty-seven were parish priests, twenty-three were curates and two were involved in education. This represented

⁹⁹ *K.S.*, 20. Oct. 1885.

¹⁰⁰ Other individuals who wished to attend had to be nominated by their local branches of the league. The number each branch could send depended on the size of each branch and the amount of money in subscriptions it submitted to the Central Branch of the league.

¹⁰¹ *K.S.*, 10. Nov. 1885.

¹⁰² *K.S.*, 10 Nov. 1885.

¹⁰³ *K.S.*, 21 Nov. 1885.

exactly half of the total number of curates in the county and fifty-five percent of the number of parish priests.¹⁰⁴

Table 5.a: Year and place of ordination of parish priests and priests involved in education who attended the 1885 National League Convention in Tralee.

	1830s	1840s	1850s	1860s	1870s	Total
Ordained in Maynooth	1	2	9	7	1	20
Abroad	0	0	2	3	1	6
n.a.	0	4	0	0	0	4
	1	6	11	10	2	30
	3%	20%	36.6%	33.3%	6.6%	

Sources: P.J. Hamell, *Maynooth: students and ordinations, index, 1795-1895* (Maynooth, 1982); Pádraig De Brun, 'Kerry Diocese in 1890: Bishop Coffey's survey' in *J.K.A.H.S.*, no. 22 (1989), pp 99-180.

The two leading clerical figures in the diocese, Bishop Higgins and the dean, John Coffey, were not in attendance. Of the four canons in the diocese only one attended, Fr O'Sullivan from Dingle. Other senior clerical figures included Irwin of Castleisland and O'Sullivan of Kenmare. The majority of the parish priests who attended were Maynooth trained and had at least twenty years experience as priests. All but two of the parish priests were ordained during the 1870s with 69.9% of all those in attendance ordained in the 1850s and 1860s and twenty percent in the 1840s. Unsurprisingly curates were younger in age. Of the figures available for the curates (table 5.b) in attendance five of the fifteen were ordained in the 1860s, four in the 1870s and the majority seven had only graduated from Maynooth in the 1880s.¹⁰⁵ In total thirteen of the priests that information is available for, were ordained in the 1870s and 1880s. The remaining became priests previous to the 1870s indicating that they were middle to late aged. The predominance of older priests ensured a degree of moderation. Furthermore, certain figures present such as Canon O'Sullivan and Archdeacon Irwin were known for promoting moderation in their respective National League branches. The presence of Fr John O'Leary, parish priest of Ballymacelligot, further depicted the conservative nature of some members of the clergy. He refused to join a branch of the National League and during the Cowper Commission

¹⁰⁴ *K.S.*, 21 Nov. 1885, *Irish Catholic Directory, almanac and registry: with complete ordo in English* (Dublin, 1886), p. 181. Twenty-seven parish priests out of a total of forty-nine in the diocese were present. Twenty-three of the dioceses fifty-six curates were present.

¹⁰⁵ Hamell *Maynooth: students and ordinations, index, 1795-1895*; Pádraig De Brun, 'Kerry Diocese in 1890: Bishop Coffey's survey' in *J.K.A.H.S.* no. 22, 1989, pp 99-180. However, no corresponding information is available for curates.

in 1886 he proudly proclaimed he never had anything to do with the league in his parish.¹⁰⁶

Table 5.b: Year and place of ordination of curates who attended the 1885 National League Convention.

	1840s	1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	Total
Studied in Maynooth	0	0	5	4	7	16
n.a.						7
Total						23

Notes on sources: No information for seven of the curates in attendance is available. This is because their names are not present in Hamell's *Maynooth*. This may signify that they attended continental colleges. Similar information for parish priests is available in De Brun, 'Kerry Diocese in 1890: Bishop Coffey's survey'. However, no corresponding information is available for curates.

The formal presence of such a large number of priests at the National League convention marked a watershed in politics in the county. Although Catholic clergy were associated with previous political movements, this was the most united demonstration of widespread clerical support behind any one organisation with the possible exception of O'Connell's Catholic Association. Effectively Catholicism and Nationalism became irrevocably intertwined. This ensured that the National League became increasingly 'respectable' and that the influence agrarian radicals and Fenians previously held was undermined.

5.4: Growth of the National League and its social composition.

By the time of the county convention in November 1885 the National League had developed into a mass movement. The league was propelled by the re-emergence of agrarian tensions within rural society. Furthermore, the organisation received widespread clerical support leading to the establishment of over fifty branches in the county. Utilising the structure of the Roman Catholic administration and the organisational skills of its clergy, branches were established on parish basis. According to the R.I.C. county inspector, Moriarty, by November 'there [was] a branch of the National League in full swing in every parish in Kerry'.¹⁰⁷ This level of localised activity was unprecedented in politics. During the height of the land war period a total of only seventeen different branches were reported as active in the *Kerry Sentinel*. The high amount of political

¹⁰⁶ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 490.

¹⁰⁷ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly report, Nov. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP box 3310).

activity was represented in the large number of branch meetings held. As depicted in table 5.c the number of branch meetings held rose from forty-eight in the first four months of 1885 to 110 for the second four months.

Table 5.c: Number of branch meetings of the Irish National League by poor law union, 1 Jan. 1885-31 Dec. 1885.

Poor Law Union	Jan.-Apr.	May-Aug.	Sept.-Dec.	Total
Cahirciveen	0	1	16	17
Dingle	0	4	15	19
Glin	0	0	3	3
Kenmare	0	0	11	11
Killarney	18	32	29	79
Listowel	16	42	66	124
Tralee	13	31	60	105
Total	48	110	200	358

Source: *K.S.*, 1 Jan. 1885-31 Dec. 1885.

During the final third of the year 200 branch meetings were reported in the *Kerry Sentinel*. In all, local branches of the league were reported as meeting on 358 occasions in Kerry during 1885. Furthermore, the organisation appeared to have the support of the mass of the non-landlord Catholic population. During a single meeting of the league in September at Ballyduff, 200 new members reportedly joined.¹⁰⁸ At another branch meeting in Ballydonoghue up to 600 were present while in Ballybunnion 352 attended.¹⁰⁹ By December 1885 Timothy Harrington, in an interview with the Central News agency, confidently stated that 1,600 branches were in existence in the country which had on average 300 members each.¹¹⁰ Local communities in their entirety joined the league. A tenant farmer of Lord Kenmare's named Denis McCarthy commented in 1888 that he was a member of the 'National League as were all his neighbours around him'.¹¹¹ The movement was undoubtedly one of the most extensive mobilisations of the mass of the people in one political movement experienced in modern Ireland.

Although the league appeared to gain support from the mass of the Catholic and non-gentry population, vital to its success was the politicisation of middle to large tenant

¹⁰⁸ *K.S.*, 18 Sept. 1885.

¹⁰⁹ *K.S.*, 13 Oct. 1885.

¹¹⁰ *K.S.*, 18 Dec. 1885.

¹¹¹ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 205.

farmers. As the Land League period demonstrated this group were pivotal to the success of any large scale agrarian movement. They supported the Land League until the radicalism of the 'no rent manifesto' threatened their position. They greatly availed of the 1881 Land Act and entered the Land Commission to receive rent reductions. By the end of 1882 they avoided the new National League until it atrophied into a defunct organisation further illustrating their importance as a political group. The renewal of the land question combined with the increasingly prominent 'Parnellism' propelled this group back onto the political stage. Frequently farmers are seen as a class unlikely to become active participants in politics, due to more pressing and unavoidable duties on the farm. Often their most important contribution in politics remained who they supported.¹¹² While this was invariably true in relation to national politics and who they supported during general elections, the localised and parish based organisation of the National League harnessed this group into political activity.

During the growth of the National League in the latter half of 1885 a significant middle class of tenant farmers aligned with Roman Catholic clerics was apparent in the leadership of league branches. The leading members of the National League at a branch level shared a number of socially defining characteristics. Similarities occurred in age, marital status and acreage of farms. This is depicted from a sample of leading members (officials and committee members) from four branches of the National League. From the Abbeydorney, Ardfert, Firies and Kilflynn branches information on twenty-one individuals was traced in the 1901 census returns, to determine a sample of the age of members of the league.

Table 5.d: Age of a sample of members from four branches of the National League, 1885.

Age	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	
Abbeydorney	1	4	0	1	1	
Ardfert	0	2	3	0	0	
Firies	1	2	0	0	2	
Kilflynn	0	1	2	1	0	
Total	2	9	5	2	3	21

¹¹² D.C. Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland: the search for stability* (3rd edn., Dublin, 1990), p. 172.

Percentage of total	9.5%	42.8%	23.8%	9.5%	14.3%
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Source: For Abbeydorney see, *K.S.*, 8 May 1885, 30 June 1885, 28 Aug. 1885, *Guy's*, pp 5-6, 1901 Census returns, roll 129, 135, 136, (N.A.I.); For Ardfert see, *K.S.*, 12 May 1885, *Guy's*, pp 77-9, 1901 Census returns; For Firies see, *K.S.*, 20 Oct. 1885, *Guy's*, p. 471, 1901 Census returns; For Kilflynn see, *K.S.*, 23 Oct. 1885, *Guy's*, p. 542, 1901 Census roll 122, 164.

This age profile demonstrates that a majority of the leading members of local league branches were aged above thirty. The largest age group was between the years of thirty and thirty-nine. These signified a new generation of community leaders who had in the previous number of years transformed their position within society. Men in this age group had generally recently acquired their farm holdings and had made the transition from farmers' sons to occupiers of land. Furthermore, many were recently married. From the Abbeydorney branch seven households had children cited as living within the family home in 1901. All of these families bar one, had a child aged sixteen years or over indicating that the head of the household was married and had children by the time they joined the branch of the National League in 1885.¹¹³ Access to marriage was increasingly restricted in post-Famine Ireland. Restrictive marriage practices emerged as subdivision of farm holdings was avoided and parents, largely concerned with the economic advantages of the match, controlled the marriage of children.¹¹⁴ The men who joined the National League were the 'favoured' sons within families whose succession to land was rapidly followed by marriage.¹¹⁵ By the second half of the nineteenth century later marriage had become increasingly prevalent within Irish society and particularly within Kerry. During the 1870s the age of marriage rapidly increased in the county. As Joseph Lee has demonstrated, between 1871 and 1881 the number of unmarried males aged between 20-29 had risen twenty-seven percent.¹¹⁶ From the sample of those who formed the leadership of the National League at a local level, they appeared to avoid this increase in age of marriage. The ability to marry at a relatively young age demonstrated this groups comfortable position within society.

¹¹³ 1901 Census returns, roll 129, 135, 136, (N.A.I.).

¹¹⁴ Jordan, *Mayo*, p. 126.

¹¹⁵ David Fitzpatrick, 'Marriage in post-Famine Ireland' in Art Cosgrove (ed.), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), p. 118.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Lee, *Modernisation of Irish society* (Dublin, 1973), p. 82.

Also, many of these farmers were prosperous middle to large sized tenants. This is demonstrated from a different sample. Concentrating on the leadership of the Abbeydorney, Ardfert and Firies branches, information was obtained on fourteen individuals. Out of this group three had a tenant farm with a valuation of over £100, four between £50-£99, and seven between £10-£49. Only one had a holding valued below £10.¹¹⁷ Many of these individuals were representative of the large farmer class who were long standing leaders within their communities, which formed the leadership of the farmers' clubs and tenant right clubs in the 1870s.¹¹⁸ During the pre-land war period they also made up the body of elected guardians. As Feingold has demonstrated:

most guardians prior to the period of the Land League probably regarded their posts as status symbols: the recognition of their right, won at the ballot box, to preside in an exclusive atmosphere and participate with the upper crust of rural society in making important community decisions... the board of guardians provided the perfect setting for the bourgeois with an interest in expanding his horizons: both social and political advancement and no doubt some economic benefits, derived from new business contracts, awaited the aggressive farmer or shopkeeper who sought entry into the public service as a P.L.G..¹¹⁹

Similar to becoming an elected P.L.G., featuring prominently in a local branch of the National League provided individuals with a degree of prestige and status within their local communities.¹²⁰ In turn, the leadership of the league was swelled with members of the rural bourgeoisie. With access to land and marriage this class formed the rural elite of the non-gentry population. With a long and established involvement in politics from the 1870s and the Land League, the National League was tailor made for this middle to large tenant farmer grouping.

Modern historians have long established the leading role of publicans and shopkeepers in the local leadership of the Land League.¹²¹ The prominent role of this group continued with the emergence of the National League. This was particularly evident in urban areas where merchants were prominent members of the movement. In Listowel the branch president, John Stack, was a draper. At least two other members of

¹¹⁷ Valuation records (Valuation Office, Dublin).

¹¹⁸ Sam Clark, *Social origins of the Irish land war*, p. 214.

¹¹⁹ Feingold, *Revolt of the tenantry*, pp 64-5.

¹²⁰ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power in late nineteenth century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006), p. 47.

the branches committee were merchants in the town.¹²² The middle-class leadership of the league was further illustrated with the appointment of a schoolteacher named John Fitzpatrick as the branch vice-president while a doctor, John Clancy, was a committee member.¹²³ In the highly disturbed Castleisland area, the league was controlled by a group of large farmers and urban traders. During a meeting of the branch in September 1885 fourteen names were published as in attendance.¹²⁴ Of this group five were traders (two vintners, two provisional dealers and one grocer) three were large farmers, one was a hotel owner and another's occupation was that of an auctioneer.¹²⁵ An R.I.C. district inspector who had served in the Castleisland region, named David Huggins, believed that the 'respectable class of farmers and shopkeepers' led the Land and National League.¹²⁶ In Tralee, shopkeepers, publicans, newspaper editors and solicitors formed the core of the leadership of the National League. This middle class grouping was central to political action previous to the emergence of the National League. They were representative of the 'Catholic people of Ireland [who] were ambitious for power- power of a social as well as political kind'.¹²⁷ The National League provided a formal and powerful expression of this desire for power.

The average tenant that came to prominence within local branches of the National League was married, middle aged, and had a sizeable holding. The National League agrarian objectives of lowering rent and setting the terms of purchase benefited such tenants the most. These objectives were socially moderate compared to the radical Land League demands of 'land for the people' and abolition of landlordism. The conservatism of the movement was further compounded by the widespread involvement of the local clergy. Despite this, there remained a radical agrarian core of activists in the county who were ever present since the land war. A complex juxtaposition of socially conservative farmers and clergy, aligned with individuals long associated with radical

¹²¹ Samuel Clark, 'The social composition of the Land League' in *I.H.S.*, xvii, no. 68 (Sept. 1971), pp. 447-69.

¹²² *K.S.*, 31 March 1885. J.J. Nolan was a vintner and R. Browne a victualler, see *Guy's*, p. 692.

¹²³ Fitzgerald, originally from Mountrath, county Laois, taught in St. Michael's Listowel. He had achieved an M.A. from Queens College, Galway. See Gaughan, *Listowel and its vicinity*, p. 109.

¹²⁴ *K.W.R.*, 26 Sept. 1885.

¹²⁵ *Guy's*, pp 224-5.

¹²⁶ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 365.

¹²⁷ Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland*, p. 173.

agrarianism appeared to be in existence in local branches. An examination of the workings of the Ballyduff branch demonstrates to some extent this relationship. During the land war secret society activity was prominent in the region. The police suspected a number of leading Land Leaguers in the region of orchestrating intimidation and boycotting. By April 1881 the Resident Magistrate for the region, Massey, recommended the arrest of a leading member of the Ballyduff League named Timothy Dooling. Massey commented: 'I deem it essential for the peace of the Ballyduff district that... Dooling be arrested'. He was suspected of writing a letter threatening the life of a process server in the region named Henry Herbert.¹²⁸ Dooling was a central agitator in the region. His original arrest predated the Land League when in May 1880 he was apprehended for violent behaviour at an eviction scene.¹²⁹ Dooling, whose occupation was a shoemaker, along with another prominent leaguer in Ballyduff, named John Houlihan, were arrested under the 1881 Protection of Person and Property Act.¹³⁰ Throughout the period agrarian outrages and moonlighting occurred within the region. In August 1882 moonlighters fired shots into the house of a tenant farmer named Cantillion who had bought grass from a local landlord. In the incident his daughter was injured.¹³¹ By 1883 attempts were made to establish a branch of the National League in the vicinity. It was suspected by the R.I.C. that all the leading members of the proposed branch, including Dooling and Houlihan, were involved in secret society activity. Furthermore, the police believed that because of this 'farmers don't want to have any connection with it in anyway and subscribe only through fear and in order to keep the organisers with them'.¹³² Despite police suspicions of the coercion of farmers into the league, it failed to develop into any substantial movement and the branch soon became obsolete. However, in 1885 the largest tenant farmers in the region readily joined the re-established branch. At the first meeting of the Ballyduff League twenty-seven names were published as in attendance.¹³³ Fourteen of these names appear as 'principal farmers' in the Ballyduff entry in *Guy's Munster*

¹²⁸ R.M. Massey on O'Sullivan (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1881/ box 2730).

¹²⁹ *K.S.*, 14 May 1880.

¹³⁰ List of arrests under the Protection of Person and Property (Ireland) Act, numbers 1-987 (N.A.I., CSO ICR)

¹³¹ *The Times*, 16 Aug. 1882.

¹³² Report on progress of Irish National Land League from 1 Jan.-28 Feb. 83 (N.A.I., ILNLP, carton vi: Irish National League proceedings).

¹³³ *K.S.*, 27 Mar. 1885.

Directory, 1886, indicating that they were some of the largest tenants in the area. Of the remaining thirteen, five were listed as artisans and one the parish priest. No entries matched the remaining seven indicating that they were most probably smaller farmers, labourers or farmers' sons.¹³⁴ Significantly, Dooling was present and remained a prominent member of the branch. Furthermore, when the National League emerged the boycotting of Herbert, the process server that Dooling threatened during the land war, resumed. The case in Ballyduff demonstrates that despite the social conservatism of much of the leading figures of branches, radical agrarians with violent reputations remained an active element within local leagues.

5.5: The 'law of the league'

The emergence of the National League as a mass organisation incorporated varying socio-economic groups. As already stated the leadership of the movement was largely made up of middle class figures and clergy. Within this group the vital middle to large tenant farmers were politicised by the interconnected issues of rent payment and purchase in the autumn of 1885. However, the National League was not solely established to meet the needs of this group. The primary objective of the movement officially remained home rule. Furthermore, the objectives of the rural poor had to be addressed in the movement. An analysis of 360 resolutions passed at local branch meetings in Kerry between January and December 1885 illustrated the range of issues that formulated local activity.

Table 5.e: A breakdown of 360 resolutions passed at National League branch meetings reported in the *Kerry Sentinel*, 1 Jan. 1885- 31 Dec. 1885.

	Jan- Apr.	May- Aug.	Sept.- Dec.	Total/ Percentage
<i>National issues and demands</i>				40 11.1%
Pro Parnell/I.P.P./I.N.L.	3	9	5	17
Land reform/Condemnation of 1881 Land Act/Landlordism	0	3	1	4
Praising/commenting on popular Nationalist figures	2	8	2	12

¹³⁴ *Guy's Munster Directory, 1886*, p. 107.

Cattle company	0	0	5	5
Buy Irish manufacture/goods	0	0	2	2
Rents/ Evicted land				82
				22.7%
Lower rents/defence funds/ tenant combinations	1	6	20	27
Warning not to break rent strikes	0	2	7	9
Condemn Land Commission judgements	0	1	0	1
Condemn Landlords/ agents	0	0	2	2
Condemnation of land/grass grabbing	2	8	4	14
Don't hold social/economic intercourse with anyone connected with evicted land	4	15	10	29
Enforcing law of the league				84
				23.3%
Don't hold social/economic intercourse with non-members of the league	1	14	3	18
Asking/demanding people to join the league	3	4	5	12
Warning expulsion for breaking rules of league	2	7	13	22
Condemning/Calling individuals before the league	1	2	5	8
Condemnation of outrage	1	3	11	14
Other	3	7	0	10
Agricultural labourers				46
				12.7%
Con acre/ score ground	4	3	20	27
Calling on boards of guardians to implement Labourer's Act	0	4	7	11
Other	0	2	6	8
Local Government				31
				8.6%
Poor Law Union elections	4	2	0	6
P.L.U. appointments/jobs	4	1	0	5
Criticising/ directing guardians	0	4	1	5
Condemn local action of police and government	4	0	1	5
Condemn royal visit	10	0	0	10
Parliamentary elections				23
				6.4%
Registration of voters	1	5	0	6
County convention	0	3	1	4
Support Irish Party candidates/ general election	0	0	13	13
Internal branch administration				34
				9.4%
Warning about non-attendance	2	1	4	7
Bring resolution/ new member before committee first	4	1	3	8
Support/sending subscriptions to central branch	4	1	3	8

Calling on members to pay subscriptions	0	3	3	6
Order in local branch meetings	0	1	2	3
Other	0	2	0	2
Other				20
				5.5%
Resolutions that don't fit into the above categories	3	11	13	20
Total				360

Source: These resolutions were deprived from a systematic examination of reports of 358 branch meetings of the National League that appeared in the *Kerry Sentinel*, 1 Jan. 1885-31 Dec. 1885.

Note: For similar analysis of resolutions passed at Land League meetings in Ireland and county Mayo see, Clark, *Social origins of the Irish land war*, p. 298; Jordan, *Mayo*, p. 231; For an analysis of resolutions passed at branch meetings of political organisations in county Clare during 1913-21 see, Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish life*, p. 237.

As depicted in table 5.e forty resolutions passed dealt with 'national issues and demands'. The most prominent in this category were resolutions passed declaring loyalty to Parnell, the Irish parliamentary party and the National League. Furthermore, branches praised and commented on Nationalist figures. This frequently occurred when such figures were in the public eye at a particular moment. In late July the Abbeydorney branch 'hailed' the reintroduction of John Dillon into the political scene.¹³⁵ Similarly, after the Nationalist cleric, Fr Walsh, was appointed as Archbishop of Dublin, a number of branches passed resolutions offering him congratulations.¹³⁶ Local branches also resolved support for broader national and provincial campaigns, such as the attempt by the Southern Cattle Association to boycott the Cork Steam Packet Company.¹³⁷ Other resolutions passed called for reform of the land law and particularly the 1881 Land Act. A limited amount of local activity concentrated on the demand of the National League to support Irish manufacture, and only buy goods made in Ireland.¹³⁸ In total 11.1% of all resolutions passed at branch meetings of the league dealt with issues that had significance beyond the realm of local life. This demonstrated that members of local leagues frequently placed their political activity within the context of the broader home rule and Nationalist movement. By reference to the leaders of the parliamentary party and Nationalist members of the Catholic clerical hierarchy, local branches inexorably placed

¹³⁵ *K.S.*, 21 July 1885.

¹³⁶ See Listowel N.L. *K.S.*, 3 July 1885, Ballydonoghue N.L., *K.S.*, 7 July 1885. Walsh replied and thanked the Ballydonoghue branch for the resolution, see, *K.S.*, 14 July, 1885.

¹³⁷ See Abbeydorney N.L., *K.S.*, 27 Oct. 1885, Knockane N.L., *K.S.*, 13 Nov. 1885.

these figures as the political and spiritual leadership of the movement that they spearheaded at a grassroots level. This further augmented the political and religious nature of the Catholic Nationalism that characterised the movement.

Local branches of the league were also concerned with the administration of local government with thirty-one resolutions passed concentrating on the topic. A large amount of attention was given to boards of guardians. Branches attempted to orchestrate elections, influence appointments and direct policy on such boards. Resolutions also criticised actions of the police, government and royal visits at a local level within Kerry. Twenty-two of all such resolutions were passed in the first four months of the year. This period corresponded with the annual poor law union elections and the controversial visit of the Prince of Wales.¹³⁹

Twenty-one resolutions passed at branch meetings concentrated on the 1885 general election. Six of these dealt with the registration of voters. In Tralee a registration committee was established to ensure voters were on the electoral roll while the Duagh branch warned its members to pay their poor law rates to ensure their right to vote.¹⁴⁰ Only four resolutions were passed regarding the county convention to nominate candidates for the general election. These were largely confined to branches nominating individuals to run as a candidate such as when the Ballybunnion branch proposed John Stack, vice-president of the neighbouring Listowel branch, to the convention.¹⁴¹ Despite the limited number of resolutions regarding the convention, the issue was discussed to a larger extent depicted in the fact that every branch sent a delegation of three to four members. In turn, thirteen resolutions were passed supporting and congratulating the candidates that ran and were duly elected in the contest.

Although branches did deal with national issues, local government and parliamentary elections, the overriding concern of local branches of the National League remained agrarian. Correspondingly, the issues of rent, agricultural labourers and the enforcement of the law of the league made up 212 of the total 360 resolutions passed at branch level. The most significant resolutions affecting landlord-tenant relations were the

¹³⁸ See Ballybunnion, *K.S.*, 2 Oct. 1885. The promotion of Irish industry was one of the objectives set out in the constitution of the I.N.L.

¹³⁹ For National League activity during the first four months of 1885 see, Chp. IV.

¹⁴⁰ *K.S.*, 28 Apr. 1885; *K.S.*, 23 June 1885.

number related to rent strikes. These resolutions regulated the demands of tenants, organised defence funds, and warned against tenants breaking strikes and paying their rents. For example, in early September 1885 the Ballyheigue branch resolved that tenants should pay rent only with a thirty-five percent reduction on the Busted estate and twenty-five percent abatement on the Crosbie lands.¹⁴² Furthermore, branches organised funds for the defence of striking tenants. To enforce anti-rent combinations, branches passed resolutions warning against payment by tenants.¹⁴³ The prevention of the retaking of evicted land, or as it was popularly known, land-grabbing, was centrally connected to rent strikes. The protection of evicted land was essential for the success of the anti-landlord agitation. The overall strategy was to undermine the landlord weapon of eviction by making evicted land economically non-viable by preventing such land being re-let. A large number of resolutions, twenty-nine, warned against social or economic intercourse with anyone connected with evicted land, which essentially openly threatened boycotting. These resolutions forbade not just the taking of evicted land but also labourers working on such land, the buying of hay and the grazing on evicted farms (popularly known as grass-grabbing). The interrelated issues of rent strikes and evicted land formulated much of the activity of local branches of the National League demonstrating the dominance of agrarian issues over its proceedings.

Although the demands of tenant farmers were the most prominent topic resolved at branch level, the issue of agricultural labourers was also apparent. Forty-six resolutions were passed promoting the cause of labourers. The most common issue was the agricultural labourer right to renting farmers' land for the taking of a single crop, most commonly for potatoes, in what was known as con-acre.¹⁴⁴ Totalling twenty-seven resolutions, this number equalled the other highest single issue in the sample illustrating its prominence at local branch level. The most common theme of these resolutions was that farmers grant all labourers that were members of the league con-acre at the same rent that the tenant paid the landlord.¹⁴⁵ Other resolutions called on poor law guardians to

¹⁴¹ *K.S.*, 17 Nov. 1885.

¹⁴² *K.S.*, 8. Sept. 1885.

¹⁴³ For example see Firies branch, *K.S.*, 20 Oct. 1885.

¹⁴⁴ S.J. Connelly, 'Conacre' in idem (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd edn., Oxford, 2002), p. 114.

¹⁴⁵ For example, see Knockane branch, *K.S.*, 13 Oct. 1885.

implement the terms of the 1883 Labourers Act and build labourers' cottages.¹⁴⁶ Eight other resolutions were passed which concentrated on the creation of employment for labourers by calling for public works to be opened and the banning of the use of agricultural machinery.¹⁴⁷ During one meeting in Ballyduff it was resolved to condemn 'the action of farmers, who have mowing machines and let them out on hire to others as we consider it prevents the poor workingman from getting employment and a chance of getting their hire during the busy harvest time'.¹⁴⁸ The substantial number of resolutions passed concerning agricultural labourers demonstrates that local branches of the league did attempt to promote the rights of that class often to the detriment of farmers. This reflected the new electoral power of agricultural labourers who were enfranchised for the first time in 1884.

Rent strikes, protection of evicted land, and the rights of agricultural labourers formed the social objectives of the National League at branch level. In turn, branches passed eighty-two resolutions attempting to enforce the 'law of the league'. Resolutions frequently declared that members must only deal socially and economically with other fellow members. This was often cloaked in Nationalism as depicted when the Currans branch resolved: 'for the purpose of displaying our patriotism in a practical manner, we... pledge ourselves today to hold intercourse with no farmer, trader, shopkeeper, or labourer except a member of the National League'.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, the Kilcummin branch declared that its members must 'remain aloof from those who failed to join the league and treat them as supporters of landlordism'.¹⁵⁰ In turn, branches issued forceful decrees calling on people to join the movement. In November the Knocknagoshel branch declared that everyone in the community had to join the league by the following week.¹⁵¹ In Lixnaw the league warned that those who failed to become enrolled would have their names published outside the chapel door on Sundays.¹⁵² Branches demanded the full co-operation of the non-landlord community to the extent that the Ballymacelligot branch agreed that boys under the age of sixteen would be admitted as members at a reduced

¹⁴⁶ For example, see Keelgarrylander branch, *K.S.*, 30 Oct. 1885.

¹⁴⁷ For examples see Listowel branch, *K.S.*, 14 July 1885 and Ballyduff branch, *K.S.*, 15 Dec. 1885.

¹⁴⁸ *K.S.*, 21 July 1885.

¹⁴⁹ *K.S.*, 12 May 1885.

¹⁵⁰ *K.S.*, 3 July 1885.

¹⁵¹ *K.S.*, 27 Nov. 1885.

subscription fee of 6d.¹⁵² Furthermore, branches frequently warned members with expulsion if they broke the rules of the league and this made up twenty-two resolutions.

Essentially local branches of the league constantly reinforced the political and social divisions between 'Unionist' landlords and their supports and 'Nationalists'. Resolutions passed by local branches were made up of a potent mix of Nationalist fervor, anti-landlord sentiment and Catholicism. Those who failed to join the league or abide by its rules were cast outside the movement and made pariahs and derided as grabbers and traitors to Ireland.

Local branches were largely successful in the enforcement of the 'law of the league' over agrarian society. By December 1885 the R.I.C. county inspector, Moriarty, despondently reported that, 'regarding the National League, I may say what every one knows that its laws and not those of the British government are governing this unfortunate country'.¹⁵⁴ A month later he echoed these sentiments when he reported: 'the National League has superseded British law, which is a thing of the past in Kerry and is now ruling the county completely'.¹⁵⁵ These assertions were undoubtedly a gross exaggeration which was reflected in the fact that the league attempted to legislate over agrarian matters only and the 'ordinary law' still regulated large aspects of life. However, the comments did reflect the power of the league over agrarian matters. A significant aspect of the implementation of the 'law of the league' was the development of 'league courts'. These courts had emerged during the Land League period but were largely undermined with the arrest of the Tralee Leaguers in January 1881 and thereafter discouraged by the leadership of the movement.¹⁵⁶ It has been proposed that the formation of league courts provided the basis for the development of alternative agrarian legal systems from the official law that would emerge during the later periods of the United Irish League and Sinn Fein.¹⁵⁷ These league 'courts' adopted the forms, methods and language of legal tribunals. The committees of local branches summoned defendants and witnesses, heard cases, issued judgements and assigned penalties. Proceedings were

¹⁵² *K.S.*, 22 Sept. 1885.

¹⁵³ *K.S.*, 15 May 1885.

¹⁵⁴ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly report, Dec. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, box 3310).

¹⁵⁵ South Western Division: D.I.s' monthly report, Jan. 1886 N.A.I., CSO RP, box 3310).

¹⁵⁶ See Chp. II.

¹⁵⁷ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism*, p. 131; Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution*, p. 126.

begun in cases when complaints against individuals were raised orally at a meeting.¹⁵⁸ Significantly, in doing so these courts did not offer a radical alternative to the existing law institutions of the petty sessions but closely modelled themselves on the established forms.¹⁵⁹ Cases were usually heard at the following meeting of the branch where the accused could contest the charges or offer an explanation and the committee would give its verdict. Failure to attend or offer an adequate response would lead to the individual being declared obnoxious and subsequently punished, which largely meant boycotting. The Cowper Commissioners described the process of the National League courts as:

the methods of passing resolutions at National League meetings, causing their proceedings to be reported in the local newspapers naming obnoxious men and then boycotting those names. Tenants who have paid even the judicial rents have been summoned to appear before self constituted tribunals, and if they failed to do so, or appearing failed to satisfy these tribunals have been fined or boycotted. The people are more afraid of boycotting, which depends for its success on the probability of outrage, than they are of the judgements of the courts of justice. This unwritten law in some districts is supreme.¹⁶⁰

Correspondingly, as the league courts emerged boycotting rapidly grew. As early as May 1885 the Divisional Magistrate for the Southwest, Captain Plunkett, believed that, 'the system of boycotting is decidedly on the increase owing entirely to the teaching of the Irish National League'.¹⁶¹ In the proceeding eight months the number of individuals boycotted in the county rose from thirty-seven in June to ninety-seven by January 1886 (it should be noted that out of this number only seven were wholly boycotted while the remaining ninety were partially boycotted).¹⁶² However, by and large the threat of the boycott, was enough to force individuals to obey the regulations of the league and individuals who went against the league frequently caved in and sought forgiveness.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Donald Jordan, 'The Irish National League and the "unwritten law": rural protest and nation building in Ireland 1882-90' in *Past and Present*, no. 158 (Feb 1998), p. 162.

¹⁵⁹ S.A. Ball, 'Policing the Land War: official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879-91' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Historical and Cultural Studies, Goldsmith's College, University of London, 2000), p. 229.

¹⁶⁰ *Cowper commission: report...*, p.7.

¹⁶¹ South Western Division: D.I.'s monthly report May 1885 (N.A.I. CSO RP 1885 10841).

¹⁶² Return showing persons wholly and partially boycotted on June last [1885] and January 86 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1886 830). In January 1886 a total of 908 people were boycotted in the whole country.

¹⁶³ For a comprehensive description of National League courts and boycotting in the Dingle region, see D.S. Lucey, *The Irish National League in Dingle, county Kerry, 1885-95* in *Maynooth Studies in Local History*: no. 48 (Dublin, 2003), pp 21-25.

Vitality the league proved extremely effective in preventing the re-taking of evicted land. By the autumn of 1886 there were 1,680 acres of derelict evicted land in the police district of Killarney alone.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, in the Castleisland region, where by December 1885 sixty evicted farms lay uncultivated, the R.I.C. district inspector believed that 'the whole community are in league to have reprisals from any person, be he landlord or tenant who interferes with, or attempts to derive any benefit from a farm from which a tenant has been evicted'.¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, local branches of the league successfully implemented rent strikes. The league proved very successful in enforcing its edicts on large sections of the community.

A further analysis of the actual cases that came before the courts of the league demonstrates the practical implementation of the 'law of the league'. Table 5.f provides a breakdown of the issues at the heart of sixty-six cases that came before league branches. This number is based on any charge, hearing or outcome that arose during meetings. The protection of the interests of tenant farmers by punishing firstly, those who broke rent strikes (28.8%), and secondly grabbed land (19.7%), were the issues at stake for almost half of all the cases that came before the league. The issue of paying rent was particularly common in league courts. During a branch meeting in Keelgarrylander the leadership resolved that a number of tenants were 'in violation of agreement with their fellow tenants to pay no impossible rents, are guilty of a breach of faith going [to the agent] separately and unknown to the rest'.¹⁶⁶ Similarly the Ballyduff branch passed 'a vote of censure' against three tenants that paid their rents on the Hickson estate.¹⁶⁷ When thirteen tenants broke a rent strike and paid their rents openly on Crosbie's estate in Ballyheigue the local league immediately expelled them.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, a significant number of cases of land grabbing came before league meetings. Similar to the cases that arose during the Land League issues of land grabbing were often complicated and varied. They were frequently based on family and neighbourly disputes and competing claims over land.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ *Cowper Commission: evidence...*, p. 501.

¹⁶⁵ South Western Division: monthly report, Dec. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1887 box 3310).

¹⁶⁶ *K.S.*, 2 Oct. 1885.

¹⁶⁷ *K.S.*, 3 Nov. 1885.

¹⁶⁸ *Cowper Commission: evidence...*, p. 513; *K.S.*, 22 Dec. 1885.

¹⁶⁹ See Chp. II.

Table 5.f: Breakdown of cases before National League 'courts', 1 Aug.- 31 Dec. 1885.

Issue	Cases	Percentage
Breaking rent strikes	19	28.8%
Land and grass grabbing	13	19.7%
Dealing with obnoxious people	23	34.8%
Breaking rules relating to agricultural labourers	7	10.6%
Other	4	6.1%
Total	66	100%

Notes: This information is gleaned from a systematic examination of reports of National League meetings between 1 Aug. 1885 and 31 Dec. 1885 published in the *Kerry Sentinel*. These newspaper reports do not offer a total account of every case before local leagues. Therefore any charge, hearing or outcome is used to make up the statistics.

The most prominent issue that arose during league courts was related to cases concerned with punishing offenders of the rules of the 'league', and particularly those that broke boycotts. Offenders of the 'law of the league' were frequently charged with holding social or economic 'intercourse' with boycotted individuals. For example, in August 1885 two members of the Ballyduff branch were charged with buying hay and meadowing from a boycotted landlord. In the same week five members of the Causeway branch had similar charges brought against them.¹⁷⁰ A league court in Dingle during September 1885 further demonstrates the prominence of such cases. Charges were issued against four shopkeepers for selling to 'landlords' men. In another case, a carman who was ordered to appear at the previous meeting on a complaint of working for Lord Ventry, offered an apology to the court and pleaded that 'he would rather to go to the workhouse than to work for [Ventry]'.¹⁷¹ These inquiries into cases where individuals were accused of breaking the rules of the league was the most common issue before the league courts. While these were implemented to enforce boycotting, branch members also attempted to influence and use the 'law of the league' for personal advantage. This was evident in the Dingle region when a hotel owner and leading league member, John Lee, orchestrated the boycott of a competing hotel owner in the town. It transpired that the intended boycotted individual, a Mrs Benner, had done nothing wrong and was a personal friend of Timothy Harrington, who intervened and warned dissolution of the

¹⁷⁰ *K.S.*, 28 Aug. 1885.

¹⁷¹ Lucey, *The Irish National League in Dingle*, p. 22.

branch if it continued to pursue such cases.¹⁷² Such issues dominated the league agitation in the Millstreet region to the extent that the parish priest for the area, Canon Griffin, believed that ‘any disturbances that took place in [Millstreet] were not caused so much by disputes between landlords and tenants as trade jealousies, which caused much boycotting’.¹⁷³ Griffin described to the Cowper Commission a case where a large shopkeeper and farmer who fell out of favour with a number of league members over road contracts. They subsequently ‘took advantage of the league for the purpose of ruining him’.¹⁷⁴ Surfacing underneath much of the action and rhetoric of the league lay an undercurrent of trade disputes and personal vendettas. Significantly, members of the league attempted to manipulate the ‘law of the league’ to gain an advantage in such disputes.

As revealed through the examination of resolutions passed at branch meetings; lower rent, protection of evicted land from ‘grabbers’, and the promotion of the rights of agricultural labourers, were the major issues that local leagues ostensibly promulgated. Significantly the National League promoted the cause of agricultural labourers, a class who had little economic incentive in the landlord-tenant agitation. However, of the sixty-six cases that came before the league only seven were related to the concerns of agricultural labourers. This indicated that despite the frequent promotion of the labourer cause it rarely resulted in branches implementing the ‘law of the league’ to enforce such policies. The issues of rent strikes, land grabbing and the breaking of the league rules dominated the cases that came before the courts of the National League. While the development of these courts may have appeared revolutionary, they essentially reinforced the social conservatism of the middle to large tenant leadership of the movement. The potentially divisive and radical demand for land redistribution by small farmers and labourers of large and grazier farm holdings did not materialise in local branches in Kerry. Such radical demands often originated from I.R.B. factions and were articulated during the emergence of the Land League in Mayo in the late 1870s.¹⁷⁵ After the spread of the movement to Leinster and Munster in 1880 this radical demand was largely

¹⁷² Ibid, pp 36-7.

¹⁷³ *Cowper Commission: evidence...*, p. 515.

¹⁷⁴ *Cowper Commission: evidence...*, p. 518.

¹⁷⁵ Jordan, *Land and popular politics*, pp 223-24.

sidelined as a result of the dominance of larger tenants in the league. By the mid 1880s such a policy failed to prominently feature in the National League, although the Galway radical, Matthew Harris frequently highlighted the issue.¹⁷⁶ Land distribution remained a source of tension in future agrarian movements, such as the U.I.L., and led to much class dissension between small and large farmers at a local level.¹⁷⁷ However, the issue of land redistribution was not significantly articulated at a branch level in Kerry during the period of the National League. Other potentially socially divisive issues included the league's ban on grass-grabbing (in my analysis of National League resolutions and court cases grass-grabbing and land-grabbing have been treated as one). This prohibited farmers from grazing on evicted or untenanted landlord land for short periods, usually under the eleven-month system. Potentially this could provoke hostilities between small holders and those who most likely had the ability to invest in grazing, larger tenants and urban traders.¹⁷⁸ However, such social tensions failed to emerge and the prevention of grass-grabbing was carried out largely to protect evicted farms and calculated to further injury landlords.

The 'law of the league' and National League courts were centrally aimed at protecting and promoting the interests of tenant farmers. Socially radical demands such as land redistribution failed to be articulated to any extent. Certain issues relating to agricultural labourers were regularly referenced to in resolutions passed by branches. Such rhetoric, however, failed to translate into the everyday activities of the league. The cases that came before the local branches reflected the reality of the movement's objectives. Rent strikes and land-grabbing far outweighed the cause of labourers as the matters that concerned the league. This demonstrated the dominance of the objectives of farmers in the movement. Furthermore, the use of the law of the league for personal gain depicts another motivation behind much of the actions of local branches

5.6: The Irish National League and the development of Nationalism and the Irish 'nation'.

¹⁷⁶ For example of Harris's opinion on land redistribution see, *U.I.*, 11 July 1885.

¹⁷⁷ For a detailed examination of such tensions at a local level in the Craughwell branch of the U.I.L in county Galway during 1907 see, Campbell, *Land and revolution*, pp 154-65.

¹⁷⁸ David Seth Jones, 'The cleavage between graziers and peasants' in *Irish peasants*, p. 381.

Although agrarian motivations undoubtedly led to the rapid emergence of the National League in 1885 the movement was cloaked in the political ideology of Parnellism. The local elite of clergy and urban and rural middle class that formed the leadership of the movement perpetuated the rhetoric of Parnellism. The ritual condemnation of landlordism was accompanied with the utterances of home rule. At a public demonstration in the south Kerry region of Prior in September 1885, the main organiser of the meeting, Fr Arthur Murphy proclaimed in quasi-religious language: ‘my friends follow Mr Parnell loyally and believe me he will lead us to the old temple of Irish liberty in College Green’. The meeting resolved: ‘that in union with all true Irishmen we back up the leader of the Irish people in his fight for legislative independence’.¹⁷⁹ The following week at a National League demonstration in Kenmare a publican, named J.D. Sullivan, proclaimed from a platform that also consisted of the local parish priest and a number of the leading traders from the town: ‘we will never be satisfied until we have our own parliament in College Green. In two simple words “Home Rule” are all our hopes’.¹⁸⁰ During October the theme was continued at a meeting in Causeway, where ‘there were about 300 persons present, including about twenty horseman wearing green sashes’.¹⁸¹ The local parish priest, Fr Enright, exuded ‘that Ireland will never be a contended and prosperous nation until it obtains the inalienable right to make its own laws in a separate Irish parliament’.¹⁸² The language of home rule was quickly permeated to the activities of local branches. The renewed agrarian agitation and the ‘law of the league’ were propagated in Nationalist tones. The Kenmare league warned its members to ‘buy off no man who is an anti-national’.¹⁸³ Nationalist rhetoric was prominent at elections to local bodies. During an election campaign for the Killarney Town Commissioners in December 1885 the *Kerry Sentinel* called on the voters ‘to vote for no man who is not a Nationalist’.¹⁸⁴ The National League compounded the use of Nationalist rhetoric on the everyday realities of local political activity.

¹⁷⁹ *K.S.*, 18 Sept. 1885.

¹⁸⁰ *K.S.*, 25 Sept. 1885.

¹⁸¹ Report on National League meeting at Causeway, 7. Oct. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1885 19118).

¹⁸² *K.S.*, 17 Oct. 1885.

¹⁸³ *K.S.*, 18 Sept. 1885.

¹⁸⁴ *K.S.*, 15 Dec. 1885.

As demonstrated the local leadership of the National League was dominated by the middle classes of provincial Ireland. The social and political aspirations of such figures were burgeoning long before the emergence of the National League and were in evidence during the Land League and the 1870s. By 1885 their involvement in the new Nationalist movement was essential to its success. They formed the 'lynchpin of organisation in an environment where the leading patriotic figures were concentrated in Dublin and London'.¹⁸⁵ By purporting Parnellism at demonstrations, branch meetings, and through the public press, the local leadership of the National League provided the channels of communication and means to disseminate the political ideology at a local level. They provided the essential literate middle stratum within society that could sustain a political organisation that went beyond the local.¹⁸⁶ This process was vital for the widespread adoption of Nationalism in Catholic Ireland. It in particular appealed to a rural middle class of Catholic tenant farmers who through the on-going legislative process on the land law appeared to be on the verge of becoming a proprietary class.

The emergence of the National League as a mass movement was a watershed moment in the development of Irish Nationalism. The development of the 'law of the league' has been viewed as central to the emergence of *de facto* Irish institutional structures, which challenged British rule. This can be seen in the creation of an alternative legal system and the view that the league was a state within a state.¹⁸⁷ In the most important historical work to date on the National League, Donald Jordan has recognised the significance of this, and stated that the members of the 'local branches embraced the idea... that they were the Irish nation'.¹⁸⁸ However, although Jordan provides an excellent insight into the working of the law of the league he largely fails to develop on this and the dynamics of the National League that were acting as the Irish 'nation'. His most important point on the overall effect of the league on the process of 'nation-building' is confined to his belief that the 'work of the National League furthered

¹⁸⁵ Alan O'Day, 'Ireland's Catholics in the British State, 1850-1922' in Andreas Kappeler in collaboration with Fikret Adanir and Alan O'Day, *The formation of national elites: comparative studies on governments and non-dominant ethnic groups in Europe, 1850-1940* (Worcester, 1992), p. 57.

¹⁸⁶ Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish Nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 79.

¹⁸⁷ Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism*, pp 94-115.

¹⁸⁸ Jordan, 'The Irish National League and the "unwritten law"', p. 146.

the movement towards political modernity and democracy'.¹⁸⁹ A number of problems arise with this conclusion. Correctly, the National League did appeal to a large proportion of the population and not just the middle-class tenant farmer base of its local leadership. This is best illustrated in the large number of resolutions promoting labourer issues. However, labourers never featured prominently in the leading positions of branches. Furthermore, the reality of local branch activity was centrally concerned with the social objectives of tenant farmers. Despite the pan-class rhetoric of the movement the interests of larger land-holders dominated the actions of the league, which invariably provided such farmers and clergy the opportunity to further their social and at times economic standing. The National League was no more democratic than the political system current in the United Kingdom and Ireland during the period. The National League, ostensibly at the least, claimed to represent both farmers and agricultural labourers, all of whom were enfranchised under the 1884 Franchise Act. In a way, the National League was responsive to the democratisation of electoral politics under way during the period and not a far minded egalitarian movement. This was further illustrated in the movement's failure to articulate the rights of those who remained outside electoral politics, i.e. women and the landless.

The most significant aspect of the mobilisation of the 'masses', which the National League facilitated, is not necessarily the development of democracy but more its importance in relation to the idea of an Irish 'nation' and the maturity of Irish Nationalism. The wider intellectual currents of the modern age have widely dispensed the belief that nature or some divine law predestines nations, and recognised that the nation is a 'construct' and not a 'given'.¹⁹⁰ The National League can in no way be credited with the construction of an Irish 'nation'. Although nations can be at least traced back to medieval and early modern times, Nationalism largely began to take its modern form in the 1780s where thereafter, particularly in the Irish case, a national collectivity took a centrality to political life.¹⁹¹ However, the National League marked a watershed in the development of Nationalism and ultimately what constituted an Irish 'nation'. According

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 171.

¹⁹⁰ R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: Inventing the nation* (London, 2003), p. 1; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

¹⁹¹ Comerford, *Nation*, p. 3.

to Boyce the progress of the National League, 'showed that something had happened in Ireland that might be called a revolution of the mind', which saw Irish Catholics aligning their goals with the parliamentary whatever their attraction to home rule.¹⁹² At the level of 'high' politics Emmet Larkin has depicted the nascent political state of independent Ireland in the alignment of the Catholic Church and parliamentary party in the 1880s. He stated that as a result of this union 'an Irish state had... been created in the minds of most Irishmen'.¹⁹³

At a local level the National League provided the tactic link between the socio-economic forces of the Catholic Church, the non-landlord elite of rural society and tenant farmer agrarianism within the broad political framework of home rule. These groupings were intermittently inter-linked at a local level long before the National League but the movement with over 1,500 branches countrywide, provided the most formal, organised and extensive expression of these forces under a single political objective. Nationalism is a dynamic rather than static phenomenon and the point it reached in Ireland in 1885 through the National League was significantly different from the Land League and other previous 'Nationalist' movements (most comparable being O'Connell's repeal movement which was limited geographically). Historians of Ulster Unionism have identified the importance of this period in the emergence of an Ulster identity (or nationality).¹⁹⁴ Alvin Jackson poses the question of whether or not an Ulster 'nation' existed in 1886 to address the problematic relationship between Unionism with Britain and a separate Ulster regional identity. To address this question Jackson adopts a conceptual framework based on the work of Anthony Smith's definition of a nation, which is,

a large, vertically integrated and territorially mobile group featuring common citizenship rights and collective sentiments, together with one or more common characteristic(s) which differentiate its members from those of similar groups with whom they stand in relations of alliance or conflict.¹⁹⁵

While Jackson has adapted this model to understand Ulster regional identity in the United Kingdom, the theory can be readily applied to the National League in 1885. By

¹⁹² Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland*, p. 173.

¹⁹³ Emmet Larkin, 'Church, state, and nation in modern Ireland' in *American Historical Review*, lxxx, no. 5 (Dec. 1975), p. 1263.

¹⁹⁴ Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster Party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884-1911* (Oxford, 1989).

¹⁹⁵ A.D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (2nd edn., London, 1983), p. 175.

vertically integrated group Smith means vertical social and economic bonding. By presenting the National League as a pan-class movement which promoted both the rights of tenant farmers and agricultural labourers it highlighted the bond between the two groups. The widespread involvement of the clergy further compounded the allegiances of the poor behind the Nationalism of the league. As James MacLaughlin has observed, the gospel of Nationalism propagated from the pulpit meant that 'the Catholic poor often found it difficult to know where their pronouncements of their religious superiors left off, and where their class preferences and political teachings took over'.¹⁹⁶ Much scholarly attention on Nationalism has identified the power of national loyalties over other forms of collective action, i.e. class, gender and race, with only religious attachments rivalling the 'national' in scope and fervour.¹⁹⁷ The role of the clergy appeared to successfully fuse the two potent forces at a local level. The 'law of the league' formulated the nation at a real and practical level. Members of the organisation ostensibly had 'common citizen rights' within the movement, which revolved around the right to access to land enshrined in the 'law of the league' and the fact that they shared the same religion. The denunciation of landlords and grabbers gave the movement 'collective sentiments'. The prohibition of all social and economic intercourse with individuals who broke the law of the league ensured and the obvious denominational character of the movement ensured that its members were differentiated from 'similar groups with whom they stand in relations of alliance or conflict'.

Undoubtedly, it is generally desirable for historians not to concentrate too much on testing and elaborating theories or schematic formulae.¹⁹⁸ However, the role the National League had in making the Irish 'nation' a local reality is a highly significant development. The movement was the most extensive political organisation witnessed at a local level in nineteenth century Ireland. Operating on a parish basis 358 branch meetings were reported in the *Kerry Sentinel* in 1885 alone ensuring that it permeated all vicinities and levels of society and the 'law of the league' and regular courts gave the National League 'nation' a very real existence.

¹⁹⁶ James MacLaughlin, *Reimagining the nation-state: the contested terrains of nation building* (London, 2001), p. 9.

¹⁹⁷ John Hutchinson and A.D. Smith (eds), *Nationalism* (Oxford, 1994), p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Comerford, *Nation*, p. 2.

Chapter VI: Agrarian violence and Nationalism.

6.1: Introduction

The nature of agrarian violence in nineteenth century Ireland has received a large amount of historical analysis.¹ Much of this has concentrated on the level of politicisation exhibited by agrarian secret societies such as Ribbonmen and Whiteboys. It has been argued by Tom Garvin that Ribbon societies were centres of lower class Nationalist that were imbued with sectarianism and had a lineage to the Defender movement of the 1790s.² He contends that Ribbonism was a well institutionalised movement that was of a proto-Nationalist nature. Importantly, he believes that the basis of these societies was 'assimilated into later organisations of Fenianism, the Land League, Parnell's Irish National League and in particular Hibernianism'.³ Recent research has countered the supposed link between pre-Famine movements and the mass organisations of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Concentrating on county Westmeath, during what was widely believed to be the last Ribbon outbreak in 1870-1; A.C. Murray has highlighted the inconsistencies in definitions of Ribbonism by government officials. Significantly, police frequently labelled crimes that they could not solve, as acts of Ribbonism. He also contends that there is little evidence of co-operation between localities and concludes that the 'Westmeath case invites great scepticism of the image of Ribbonmen as revolutionary Nationalists and doubt of any interpretation which attempted to define true or proper Ribbonism'.⁴ Although much of southern Ireland, including county Kerry, were never areas of Ribbonism, other forms of agrarian violence were prominent in the region. Most commonly in the pre-Famine era, this was in the form of Whiteboyism. Joseph Lee has

¹ See Michael Beames, *Peasants and power: the Whiteboy movements and their control in pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex, 1983); J.S. Donnelly, 'Pastorini and Captain Rock: millenarianism and sectarianism in the Rockite movement of 1821-4' in Samuel Clark and J.S. Donnelly (eds) *Irish peasants, violence and political unrest, 1780-1914* (Manchester, 1983), pp 102-39; Tom Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-Famine Ireland' in *Past and Present*, no. 96 (1982), pp 133-55; K.T. Hoppen, *Elections and society, 1832-85* (Oxford, 1984), pp 341-78.

² Michael Beames, 'The Ribbon-societies: lower-class Nationalist in pre-Famine Ireland' in *Past and Present*, no. 97 (1982), p. 128.

³ Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-Famine Ireland', p. 140

described the existence of class tensions between tenant farmers and agricultural labourers over the issue of con-acre as a significant motivating factor behind such agrarian violence.⁵ In contrast, Michael Beames has posited that Whiteboyism was derived from landlord-tenant tensions. Significantly, this agrarianism encompassed a wider consciousness based not on politics but that of class. It was not the typical vehicle of protest for the Catholic rural community, but collectively Whiteboys represented the poorer strata of society. They acted beyond the realms of the local and personal in which ‘strangers came together in the Whiteboys movements to pursue common objectives underwritten by a complex web of social, economic and psychological obligations. Essentially, Whiteboyism was the organised expression of a particular social class’.⁶ Two central issues surround the historiography of agrarian violence in the pre and post Famine period. These revolve around the merits of outrage being an expression of Nationalist and/or class-consciousness.

The understanding of violence during the 1880s remains ambiguous. This is particularly the case when examining the Land League. Uncertainty prevails in the understanding of the emergence of the alliance between constitutional and physical force Nationalists in the late 1870s and ‘there remains an element of mystery about what precisely transpired between Parnell, Davitt and Devoy in the preparation of the “new departure”’.⁷ When the league enforced the moral force of boycotting the ‘connection between ostracism and violence was indirect but pervasive’.⁸ Invariably the league’s power partially relied on ‘a substratum of intimidation and real violence, though it was hard to quantify or apprehend’.⁹ Although many league leaders promoted peaceful methods, the Land League politicised all agrarian issues including outrage. As politicians and the organisation of the league adopted agrarian issues it had ‘the incidental effect of imposing the “peculiar institution” of “Whiteboyism”... on the grassroots structure of the

⁴ A.C. Murray, ‘Agrarian violence and Nationalist in nineteenth century Ireland: the myth of Ribbonism’ in *Irish Social and Economic History*, xiii (1986), p. 73.

⁵ Joseph Lee, ‘The Ribbonmen’ in T.D. Williams (ed.), *Secret societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), pp 26-35.

⁶ Beames, *Peasants and power*, p. 62.

⁷ R.V. Comerford, ‘Republicans and democracy in modern Irish politics’ in Fergal McGarry (ed.), *Republicanism in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 14.

⁸ Charles Townshend, *Political violence in Ireland: government and resistance since 1848* (Oxford, 1983), p. 116.

⁹ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 408.

first modern Irish political party'.¹⁰ The Whiteboy tradition of local defence and arbitration was politicised into a broader Nationalist movement. Notwithstanding these assertions, many of the issues surrounding the violence of the pre and post Famine period still resonated during the Land League. Importantly, opponents of the league frequently accused the leadership of the movement of organising the violence from the top down, culminating in the attempt of the Special Commission of 1888 to portray the Land and National Leagues as criminal conspiracies, which were directly responsible for the widespread violence of the decade.¹¹ The level of actual involvement of the formal Nationalist movements of the period in agrarian violence remains uncertain. This chapter will attempt to address this issue by concentrating on agrarian outrages in county Kerry and their relationship with the Land League and Fenianism. Furthermore, it will concentrate on the relationship of agrarian violence, and those who perpetuated it, with the constitutional National League.

Undoubtedly agrarian violence grew in tandem with the Land League. Although outrages did occur in the immediate post-Famine period in Kerry, they never took the form of a systematic agrarian campaign. As table 6.a. demonstrates, up to 1879 the incidence of agrarian outrage remained low offering little warning of the portentous violent upheaval that was to follow.

Table: 6.a: Number of agrarian outrages reported to the R.I.C. in county Kerry, 1850-79.

Years	1850-59	1860-69	1870-79
Number of outrages	48	45	73

Source: Return of outrages, 1879-93 (N.A.I., CSO ICR, vol. 1)

The incidence of agrarian outrage dramatically rose in 1880 when 298 outrages were reported in the county. The majority of these occurred in the final three months of the year, which corresponded with the introduction and growth of the Land League in the county.¹² This provided the police with an inferential link between outrage and the Land League. This appeared particularly the case with Kerry, as the widespread distress of

¹⁰ Tom Garvin, *The evolution of Irish Nationalist politics* (Dublin, 1981), p. 77.

¹¹ Margaret O'Callaghan, *British high politics and a Nationalist Ireland: criminality, land and the law under Forster and Balfour* (Cork, 1994), p. 113.

¹² Return of outrages, 1879-93 (N.A.I., CSO ICR, vol. 1).

1879-80 winter appeared to have subsided by the autumn of 1880 leaving many with the belief that 'the increase in outrage [was] inexplicable except as a consequence of conspiracy'.¹³ However, Lee has highlighted that the slower onset and recovery of the crisis in dairying influenced the intensification of the violence in Kerry. According to Lee, this was compounded by population pressures in the county, which saw the population rise by two percent in the 1871-81 period. In turn, the age of marriage rose, leaving a large number of discontented unmarried men consigned to the status of 'boys' who were willing to participate in secret societies and moonlight gangs.¹⁴ Demographic and economic circumstances were important catalysts for the outbreak of violence.

6.2: Fenianism and the outbreak of agrarian disorder

Notwithstanding these important socio-economic circumstances, the extent to which the violence was orchestrated by a broader movement was unclear. In 1880 local gentry figures believed a major Fenian organised rising was afoot. In December 1880, the captain of the Kerry Militia wrote to the Chief Secretary's Office warning of what he believed to be preparations for a potential rebellion in Tralee town. He wrote:

there is the gravest fear that the spirit of rebellion, which is now smouldering will openly break out.... I am from my own personal knowledge aware that for months past drilling has been conducted. Almost two months ago I heard drilling in the vicinity of my house... no later than Christmas day I passed a small body of men marching and led in military order in the streets of Tralee at about half past twelve in the forenoon.... I have further to state that I believe the Land League leaders carefully avoid any identification of their organisation with the "Fenians" or "Nationalists" but the latter are availing themselves actively of the Land League agitation for the development of their schemes.... Almost all parts of the country shooting and the discharging of arms is to be heard in a way before unknown. The belief among the gentry here is that arms have got into the hands of very many.¹⁵

Much of these claims were over-exaggerated and it later transpired that the drilling Phibbs 'heard about the house at night may [have been] attributable to the young men who were visiting his women servants'.¹⁶ However, the belief that Fenians were

¹³ Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.84; Townshend, *Political violence*, p. 174; For a further analysis of this social group see Donnelly, *Cork*, pp 249-50.

¹⁵ Capt. Phibbs to Chief Secretary's Office, 30 Dec. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1881 1221).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

infiltrating the Land League and were responsible for much of the outrages was common. Although Fenianism was particularly weak in Kerry during the 1860s, the movement did appear to have emerged by the late 1870s in the county. According to I.R.B. records there were 160 members of the society in the county in January 1877, with a mere twenty-five rifles.¹⁷ During 1878 there were genuine fears amongst the police that portions of Connaught were more 'deeply tainted with secret societies than any other division of the country'. Although such societies remained limited in Kerry, there were signs that Fenians were organising in the county. During April 1878 'the priests of two parishes warned their congregations against attempts, which they said were being made to revive Fenianism'.¹⁸ By 1879 Fenianism grew in certain regions in the county. In Castleisland a Fenian society was established in the town, although it did not take an agrarian character and was made up largely of urban dwellers with only two farmers' sons involved.¹⁹ In late 1879 the resident magistrate for Tralee, Considine, believed that along with Castleisland, Fenianism had spread to Tralee and Abbeydorney.²⁰ The magistrate in Killarney town was of the opinion that while there was no illicit importation of arms into the region, the 'young men... do not hide their animosity towards landlords and government, and only requires the coalition of the farming class to cause it to become a terror and danger'.²¹ Furthermore, known Fenians from the 1867 rising, such as J.D. Sheehan, were suspected of organising Fenianism in the region during 1878-79.²²

Fenians appeared to have been organised to some extent in the county before the establishment of the Land League, which first appeared in October 1880. When the Land League emerged known Fenians were active in the local leadership of branches. This was particularly evident in the Tralee League where Michael Power was a leading member of the branch.²³ According to the R.I.C., Power was 'even by his own professions and admissions, to be the most thoroughly disloyal man in Tralee. [He] has always taken the

¹⁷ 'Select documents: XXXII The I.R.B. supreme council, 1868-78', eds T.W. Moody and Leon O'Broin in *I.H.S.* vol. xix, no. 75 (Mar., 1975), p. 322

¹⁸ Fenian files (N.A.I., CSO Fenian A Files, Carton 4, A 574).

¹⁹ T.D. Sullivan, *A popular history of east Kerry* (Dublin, 1931), pp 88-89.

²⁰ Report of county inspectors of the R.I.C., 31 Oct. 1879 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1880 34686).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² File on J.D. Sheehan (P.R.O. CO/904: microfilm, N.L.I., p. 956). Sheehan was arrested for partaking in the 1867 rising.

²³ For an example of Power's involvement in the Tralee Land League see, *K.S.*, 26 Oct. 1880.

lead at all Fenian displays.’²⁴ By the end of 1880 he was suspected of organising at least one agrarian outrage and reinstating evicted tenants. It was believed that he was using the Land League to promote Fenianism and during a meeting at Abbeydorney, Captain Phibbs suspected that he ‘was busy during the day getting young men, principally farmers’ sons and labourers to join the body which he represents; [and] I understand with success’.²⁵ The emergence of the Land League was undoubtedly connected to some extent with Fenianism at a local level in Kerry.

During the Special Commission in 1888 the R.I.C. inspector for the Castleisland district, Davis, claimed that outrages were perpetuated by a secret society under instruction from the league leader, Michael Boyton in Dublin.²⁶ The basis of suspicion for this lay in a speech that Boyton gave in Castleisland in September 1880, which led to the establishment of the Land League in the region. In a speech that he was later arrested for under the P.P.P. Act, Boyton openly promoted illegal activity.²⁷ Although Boyton stressed that no violence on the person was to be committed and that he ‘won’t encourage anything of that sort’ he did promote attacks on land-grabbers property. He warned ‘grabbers’: ‘the fences will fall down.... His corn will be cut down’. He discouraged the ‘shooting of landlords and agents’ but did state that ‘when a man is charged with using violence to a landlord’s agent, it is the duty of the Land League to see that man gets a fair trial’.²⁸ Subsequently, the Castleisland region became notorious as a centre of agrarian violence. Other individuals in the region who openly promoted violence included a curate and Land League member named Father Murphy, who in September 1881 was reported as stating that some tenants were paying their rent ‘by the back stairs’ and asked was there ‘no good night boys in the locality’.²⁹ Captain Plunkett, the Special Resident Magistrate for the south-west believed that in Castleisland ‘no place in Ireland was as strong language used during the agitation’.³⁰ While prominent national and local league figures alluded to the use of violence in the Castleisland region, the authorities viewed

²⁴ Report of county inspectors of the R.I.C., 31 Oct. 1879 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1880 34686).

²⁵ Capt. Phibbs to Chief Secretary’s Office, 30 Dec. 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1881 1221).

²⁶ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 414.

²⁷ List of persons prosecuted under the P.P.P. (Ireland) Act nos 1-206 (N.A.I., CSO/ICR 5)

²⁸ *K.S.*, 12 Oct. 1880.

²⁹ *Special commission... vol. ii*, p. 335. Night boys was a common phrase for moonlighters.

³⁰ Report to Lord Spencer Chief Secretary concerning why Castleisland is the worst district in Ireland (NAI, CSO RP, 1883 24113).

the upsurge of violence in the area as clearly connected with a Fenian inspired conspiracy. In 1883 a resident magistrate for the region contended that he had 'very little doubt but that many of the younger members of the community belonged to the Society (Fenian) and held meetings prior to the land agitation.... Its members were during the past three years, believed to be mixed up extensively in outrage... connected with similar societies in Tralee and Cork...[and in] communication with the O'Donovan Rossa party in America, receiving its presumed instructions'.³¹

The assumptions of the police are difficult to fully determine. During the Special Commission in 1888 evidence was present which attempted to link the Land League leadership with the commission of outrage in Kerry and particularly in Castleisland. The D.I. for the region, Davis, contended: 'in the Land League there was an inner circle which organised the Fenians of the district into a Land League police, to carry out the behests of the league'.³² A self-confessed moonlighter named Thomas O'Connor described how he joined a secret society connected to the Castleisland Land League. After becoming a member of the league he was approached by a number of other members who attempted to enlist him to join the society. They 'used to say that I ought to join-that it would be a fine thing-a proud thing to be a soldier of Parnell's, and that I would get a little pay for doing nearly nothing'.³³ The members that approached him, George Twiss and John O'Connor, became known Moonlighters in the area but neither formed the leadership of the Land League branch. After O'Connor agreed to join he swore an oath to the secret society in the room of the Land League secretary, Timothy Horan. O'Connor described the first moonlight act he undertook when he, along with a group of thirty or forty others, reinstated an evicted woman on a farm, which had been taken by another tenant named Brown.³⁴ This case of 'land grabbing' had caused considerable consternation in the Castleisland League. Brown was called before the league in November 1880. When he failed to appear, the chairman of the meeting, Father Murphy called on him to be boycotted.³⁵ O'Connor claimed that the league's secretary, Timothy Horan, paid him 6s for his part in the action. O'Connor went on to allege that

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 413.

³³ *Special Commission... vol. iii*, p. 12.

³⁴ Ibid.

after this, he was instructed by Timothy Harrington to intimidate voters during the 1881 Poor Law Election into voting for Land League candidates. He stated that Harrington had informed him that he was 'to get them to sign the votes if possible and not to spare them, but not to kill them and not to hurt them too much.' For this he claimed he was also paid.³⁶ O'Connor's evidence to the Special Commission suggested that agrarian outrages were carried out on behalf of the Land League to enforce its objectives and regulations.

Although O'Connor's submissions were strongly contested by the Nationalist lawyers, and Harrington vehemently denied the allegations, other informants gave evidence to suggest widespread Land League involvement in agrarian violence. Another self-confessed moonlighter named Denis Tobin gave evidence concerning secret society activity in the Brosna region. Brosna lay to the east of Castleisland and was bordered with the west Limerick town of Abbeyfeale and was the centre of much agrarian violence. During a Land League meeting of the Brosna branch in December 1880 open comments were made towards the use of force.³⁷ In Tobin's evidence he stated that a Land League organiser named John McEnery swore him into a moonlighting secret society in 1880. McEnery told him that 'the Moonlighters were the only support of the league, and were it not for the Moonlighters, the league would be no good'.³⁸ Tobin described how the district was divided into three different moonlighter divisions with separate captains. McEnery was the head of the divisions and when he was arrested under the P.P.P. Act in June 1881 for being part of a gang that attacked a 'dwelling house', another prominent leaguer named William Mangan replaced him.³⁹ Although he never joined the Land League he spoke about how a member of the secret society 'had to attend the league meetings so as to hear the resolutions that would be passed against the parties who were to be raided on, and condemned by the league'.⁴⁰ He took part in a number of moonlight raids, which seized cattle off evicted land and slaughtered them. He also

³⁵ *K.S.*, 23 Nov. 1880.

³⁶ *Special Commission... vol. iii*, p. 14. The election was for the Killinieterna electoral division. Jeremiah McSweeney, a member of the league was running against a landlord candidate named Bourke. McSweeney won the contest.

³⁷ *K.S.*, 21 Dec. 1880.

³⁸ *Special Commission... vol. iv*, p. 135.

³⁹ *Ibid.*; *Return of persons who have been or are in custody under the Protection of Person and Property (Ireland) Act, 1881, up to 31 Mar. 1882*, p. 2, H.C. 1882 (156), lv, 635. In the parliamentary returns McEnery is spelt McInerney.

⁴⁰ *Special Commission... vol. iv*, p. 136.

posted a number of notices threatening a 'land-grabber' named Batt O'Connor. They were posted 'on the ditch of the road... so that people going to Mass on Sunday would see them'. For this he received three shillings.⁴¹

Another police informer and witness who appeared before the Special Commission gave further insights into the relationship between the Land League and secret societies. James Buckley, an agricultural labourer, testified to joining the I.R.B. in Causeway in November 1880. He went to a public house in the village where he was sworn in by a number of individuals. Thereafter he attended a Fenian meeting in the Land League rooms, where William Fenix was a leading member. Fenix was also a 'very active member' of the committee of the local Land League.⁴² He informed the police: 'men in Tralee... were directing the organisation who are in receipt of certain monies'. He also claimed that those in Tralee 'undertook' to supply arms'.⁴³ He described how on 31 May 1881 he joined a party of Moonlighters from the surrounding parishes of Ballyduff and Killahan. They proceeded to the house of a tenant named Thomas Sheehy who had taken a farm, which his brother-in-law had previously held. They fired a shot into his house to intimidate him off the land.⁴⁴

Buckley went on to describe how he was ordered to murder an expelled member of the Land League, who was suspected of giving information to the police leading to the arrests of William Fenix and Thomas Dee under the P.P.P. Act.⁴⁵ Buckley was asked to shoot the suspected informer, Roche, and told that he would receive money from the Land League funds to go to America. On the day of the proposed assassination Buckley, who was armed with a revolver, began talking to Roche outside his house. When Roche turned his back to depart, Buckley pointed the weapon at him and attempted to shoot. However, the revolver misfired and failed to shoot and after three or four more attempts. Buckley then fled with Roche fully aware of the circumstances.⁴⁶ When Buckley went to receive the money to flee to America, Thomas Dee told him to go to the president of the Land League in the area, Thomas Pierce. Pierce was a 'gentlemen farmer' and part of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴² *Special Commission... vol. iii*, p. 366.

⁴³ Considine to Plunkett, Police reports Oct. 1882 (N.L.I., H.F Considine papers, unsorted collection).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Dooling was a shoemaker in the region and was imprisoned under the P.P.P. Act on suspicion of writing threatening notices and of being a Fenian. See, Arrests under the P.P.P. Act (N.A.I., CSO ICR).

bourgeois leadership of the league. He brought Buckley 'round to some of the neighbours... to collect money to aid me [Buckley] in my escape to America'. They visited a number of the large farmers in the region and received in total a mere 4s. Some of the farmers 'promised in a few days but did not give it'.⁴⁷ Still without enough money, he was sent to the secretary of the Lixnaw branch, Thomas Dooling. Dooling was a farmer's son who was suspected of being the head of the local I.R.B. centre in the region.⁴⁸ Although he got another 5s from Dooling, Buckley failed to receive enough for his emigration.

The evidence of O'Connor, Tobin and Buckley demonstrated the relationship local Land League branches had with Moonlighters. Individual members central to the leadership of league branches were also the most prominent members of the secret societies. The actual persons that carried out the agrarian violence were not necessarily members of the Land League. They rarely attended league meetings and were directed by the one or two individuals who were members. All testified that they believed they were carrying out the wishes of the league. Significantly, they all received payment for their activities suggesting monetary gain was a substantial motivation for taking part. The evidence of Buckley in particular, suggested that large tenant farmers sympathised with their activities and patronised them to a certain extent. However, the parsimonious reaction to Buckley's attempt to raise the necessary funds to emigrate suggested that tenant farmers viewed the actual Moonlighters as dispensable. Furthermore, an analysis of those who were suspected by the police of involvement in outrages also depicts the lack of involvement by farmers in outrages. As table 6.b demonstrates, out of thirty-seven individuals suspected of orchestrating and carrying out outrages only seven were farmers. The largest group were farmers' sons who made up seventeen of those suspected. The remaining suspects were largely urban dwellers.

Table 6. b: Occupation of individuals suspected by the R.I.C. of being directly or indirectly involved in committing outrages during 1880 in county Kerry.

Farmer	7
Farmers' son	13
Labourer	1

⁴⁶ *Special Commission... vol. iii*, p. 370.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 374.

⁴⁸ File on Thomas Dooling (P.R.O. CO/904/15: microfilm, N.L.I., p. 153).

Small artisan	3
Office clerk	3
Auctioneer	2
Editor	1
Hotel Keeper	1
Merchant	1
Other	5
Total	37

Source: Lists of persons reasonably suspected of being directly or indirectly connected with outrages, 1880 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1880 34686).

6.3: Agrarian violence and the Land League

Despite the testimonies before the Special Commission, documentary evidence directly linking Land League complicity in agrarian violence was largely non-existent. Like all secret society activity little or no paper trail remained as to the inner workings of the Moonlighters. For the Land League, and the examination of the movement's relationship with agrarian violence, any analysis is further complicated by the lack of any extensive internal records of the organisation.⁴⁹ The internal history of the central branch, apart from the reports of meetings regularly published in newspapers, is largely a blank because its records and papers all disappeared before the league was suppressed in 1881.⁵⁰ This was a central complaint of the counsel at the Special Commission who claimed that the records were destroyed to cover the illegal activities of the organisation. The lack of evidence proving the league's involvement in agrarian outrage was widely apparent at a local level also. During the Commission a R.I.C. officer for the Castleisland region, D.G. Huggins, testified that he believed the leadership of the Land League in Castleisland were behind the agrarian outrages in the area. When pressed for evidence he stated:

On nearly every occasion on which I heard people, members of the Land League, speak at meetings, I heard landlords and bailiffs and men who had taken evicted farms denounced by those men and I believe that they made the men unpopular in the district and caused a great many outrages.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Some Land League papers are located in the National Library of Ireland but these are of a limited nature.

⁵⁰ T.W. Moody, *Davitt and the Irish revolution* (Oxford, 1981), p. 36.

⁵¹ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 371.

However, when pushed for more substantial evidence he admitted he couldn't produce any positive proof or information linking anybody to secret societies. Despite this, the counsel for *The Times* believed they had unearthed a certain amount of documentary evidence that would prove 'undoubtedly that the National Land League, by which I [attorney-general] mean the central office, was... paying for outrages'.⁵² A central element of this evidence was a letter purporting to be from the secretary, Timothy Horan, of the Castleisland Land League to the central branch of the league. In the letter Horan sought money to cover medical expenses of three individuals who were suffering from gunshot wounds. The fact that these individuals were members of a secret society was apparent when he wrote: 'no one knows the persons but the doctor, myself and the members of that society.... If it were a public affair, a subscription would be opened at once for them, as they proved to be heroes'.⁵³ The letter concluded by asking for the money to be sent to him or to Father John Halligan, a curate in the district. The back of the letter was signed P.J. and the amount that was granted, £6. It was dated 12 October 1881.

This document provided the counsel for *The Times* with the most compounding evidence that the central branch of the Land League funded agrarian violence. The handwriting of the letter was verified to be that of Timothy Horan and its authenticity was never questioned by the Nationalist lawyers. When John Ferguson, the Scottish businessman who was a founding member of the Land League, appeared before the commission, it was deduced that he had attended central branch meetings during the period that the letter was dated.⁵⁴ When the letter was put to him he claimed he knew nothing of it but did contend that the central branch didn't publish details of all grants that were made to local branches. When asked if he morally supported giving money to individuals in the circumstances mentioned in Horan's letter he replied:

in Ireland, my Lord, we are bound to sympathise with men who are doing things that under a constitutionally governed country we dare not and would not sympathise with.... We cannot accept we are criminal when we are sympathising

⁵² *Special Commission... vol. i*, p. 109. These were the words of the attorney-general in his opening address to the commission.

⁵³ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 409.

⁵⁴ *Special Commission... vol. viii*, p. 269.

with our wounded countrymen even when they have gone beyond what is called law.⁵⁵

Although Ferguson stressed that he was referring to incidents when people were injured by police at public demonstrations, such as the infamous 'Mitchelstown Massacre', and not secret society activity, it did demonstrate a certain favourable attitude amongst certain sections of the leadership of the Land League towards extra-constitutional activity. However, other members of the league's leadership did not hold Ferguson's opinion. When Arthur O'Connor was questioned on the Horan letter he stated:

I am perfectly aware I never saw it. If I had seen it I should have sent it back to the writer, with an imitation that the Land League funds were not available for such purposes. I think it was a most improper grant.⁵⁶

Such a diversity of opinion represented the omnipresent differences between agrarian radicals and constitutional moderates in the Land League leadership.

Significantly, the money granted to Horan was authorised by P.J. Quinn. Although Quinn was not a permanent secretary of the executive of the Land League, he did grant funds if no other senior member was present at meetings.⁵⁷ Quinn, from Claremorris, was the centre of a Fenian I.R.B. circle in county Mayo and had been involved in the Irishtown meeting. By January 1881 he became the head of the clerical staff of the league's central branch.⁵⁸ Horan knew Quinn personally, and in the letter referred to a 'private meeting' between the two at the convention of the league in September 1881 in Dublin. Importantly, this evidence demonstrated that Quinn, a known Fenian, in his position in the league was funding agrarian secret society activity in the Castleisland region. This letter was one of the few genuine pieces of evidence presented at the Special Commission, which demonstrated a direct paper trail connecting the executive of the Land League with agrarian outrages. However, it should be stressed that there was no evidence that demonstrated that the leadership of the league besides Quinn was complicit in funding violent activity in the Castleisland region.

⁵⁵ *Special Commission...* vol. viii, p. 285.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 484.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 275.

⁵⁸ Moody, *Davitt*, p. 360.

Although prominent members of local league branches appeared to have orchestrated secret society, there was a large level of opposition to outrages from many within the league. As early as August 1880, Timothy Harrington stated: 'the men of Kerry, who followed O'Connell in his monster gatherings, should know how to conduct agitation without outrage or violence'.⁵⁹ At the first meeting of the Castleisland branch outrages were condemned and it was stated that violence would 'ruin our cause'.⁶⁰ At the inaugural meeting of the Land League in Ardfert Timothy Harrington explicitly condemned outrage.⁶¹ In February 1881, the Listowel branch spoke against the use of violence.⁶² Throughout the Land League agitation condemnation of outrages was common in league rooms. League support for outrages was never total and there was a constant attempt by some sections of the local leadership to prevent violence. In some regions a struggle for influence between moderates and radicals was apparent. In Ballybunnion the local curate, Fr Godley, was of the opinion that:

I was aware of the existence of a secret society in the parish and they had no sympathy with us [Land League] in the beginning, but gradually we weaned them from the secret society, and subsequently they were satisfied with our constitutional society.⁶³

Also, from the evidence available it is apparent that commonly only a single member of the leadership of a local branch usually directed secret societies. In Causeway William Fenix led the secret society while holding the position of secretary in the local branch. Similarly, in Castleisland Horan who was also secretary of the league appeared to be the most prominent member in the secret society. Evidently, figures within or on the edges of local branches, got together to plan physical intimidation in support of league motives.⁶⁴

6.4: League suppression and the growth of violence, 1881-82

A new phase of the land war developed in October 1881 with the arrest of Parnell, announcement of the 'no-rent' manifesto and the subsequent suppression of the Land

⁵⁹ *K.S.*, 13 Aug. 1880.

⁶⁰ *K.S.*, 19 Nov. 1880.

⁶¹ *K.S.*, 21 Dec. 1880.

⁶² *K.S.*, 25 Feb. 1881.

⁶³ *Special Commission... vol. viii*, p. 576.

⁶⁴ R.V. Comerford, 'The Land War and politics of distress', in William Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, VI Ireland under the Union, II 1879-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 45.

League. During the Land League's existence no agrarian murder had occurred in the county. In the twelve month period between the emergence and suppression of the Land League in Kerry, the most serious agrarian outrages committed in the county were twelve instances of firing at the person, and five of firing into dwellings. However, with the suppression of the league a significant upsurge in serious violent outrage occurred. During the following thirteen months (Nov. 1881- Dec. 1882) four agrarian murders were committed; twelve cases of firing at dwellings and twenty-one incidents of firing at the person.⁶⁵

The mass imprisonment of 'moderate' league leaders under the P.P.P. Act removed previous restrictions and discipline leaving 'agrarian anarchy... to operate almost unchecked'.⁶⁶ Although the instability created after the widespread arrests undoubtedly led to much outrage, government officials largely suspected that radical elements of the league leadership orchestrated much of the violence for political purposes. They maintained that the increase in crime had the 'object of discrediting the government's decision to suppress the Land League'.⁶⁷ The Dublin Metropolitan Police informed the Chief Secretary's office that eight secret society organisers were dispersed around the country to orchestrate violent outrage under the direction of the extremist Patrick Egan. It was believed that £1,000 of league funds, which had previously been given as a 'sop' to the Fenians, was 'now doled out for the purpose of procuring the perpetration of crime'.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the police reported that league activists were told to 'shoot away'.⁶⁹ Importantly, the police believed that the upsurge in violence after the suppression of the league was politically motivated.

Whatever the presumptions of the police, violence was intense in Kerry and particularly in the Castleisland region. Before the suppression of the league, the Castleisland region was the centre of much secret society activity. In the period between December 1880 and April 1881, a systematic campaign of night raids for arms and intimidation of tenants and landlord employees emerged. In this five month period,

⁶⁵ Return of outrages (NAI, CSO ICR, vol. 1).

⁶⁶ F.S.L. Lyons *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977), p. 177.

⁶⁷ Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 201.

⁶⁸ (CSO ILLNLP, carton viii).

⁶⁹ Stephen Ball, 'Policing the Land War: official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879-91' (University of London, Ph.D., 2000), pp 156-57.

twenty-four separate attacks by armed gangs. They demanded money, weapons, administered illegal oaths and damaged livestock and property.⁷⁰

In one of the more vicious of these attacks both cars were cut off a bailiff in the employment of Herbert of Muckcross named Michael Dennehy on 26 April 1881.⁷¹ The previous day Maurice Murphy, a hotel owner and leading member of the Castleisland League, warned Dennehy to give up serving writs for eviction. Murphy told him to return the writs and go to 'Terry Brosnan and nothing will happen'.⁷² Brosnan was another leading league figure in the region and a publican. Dennehy failed to do as instructed and was subsequently attacked. The D.I. for the region, Davis, believed that 'Brosnan instigated it' and that his 'house is the resort of Fenians'. Furthermore, Brosnan's son, Timothy was assistant secretary of the Castleisland Land League. The police believed: '[his] father's house is the chief resort of all the known disloyal characters about this town; he is generally believed to be the organiser of all the raids for arms, which took place in this district in December 1880 and January 1881'.⁷³ Dennehy also identified one of his attackers as Patrick Quinlan. Dennehy had previously served a writ on Quinlan's uncle, Lawrence Quinlan. The police believed that the Quinlan's house was 'a meeting place for the night boys' and that Patrick with his two brothers, Lawrence and William, committed the outrage along with one other individual named Cornelius Hussey. Hussey had recently returned from America and was a brother of another suspected moonlighter named Edward Hussey. Edward was suspected of attacking a house that belonged to a gamekeeper of Drummond's named James Black in January 1881. Black was beaten and two guns and a revolver were robbed off him.⁷⁴ It was reported that Hussey 'was constantly seen by the police in company with bad characters and is believed to have been concerned in all the raids for arms made in this district'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the Husseys and Quinlans were neighbouring families and were related. In May 1881, the three Quinlan brothers and Cornelius Hussey were imprisoned for committing the attack on

⁷⁰ For a description of these outrages see *Special Commission... vol. ii*, pp 328-30.

⁷¹ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 330.

⁷² Outrage report: attack on Dennehy (N.A.I., CSO P.P.P. Act carton i).

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 329.

⁷⁵ Report on Edward Hussey (N.A.I., CSO P.P.P. Act carton i).

Dennehy. Furthermore, Timothy Brosnan and his son were also imprisoned under the act.⁷⁶

During the months following these internments outrages did continue, although at a less serious rate. Between May and the end of September only one shooting occurred in the region.⁷⁷ However, the suppression of the league in October 1881 led to the emergence of an unprecedented level of outrage. Threatening letters, illegal oaths and raids for arms continued. Tenants who paid their rents were met with violence. In October a tenant who paid his rent, named Maloney, had his horse mutilated.⁷⁸ In November another tenant, named Thomas Galvin of Doonane, was shot in the thigh for the same offence. Again the Hussey and Quinlan families were involved in this attack. Lawrence Quinlan was released from prison after a number of weeks due to his young age and was believed to have led the moonlight gang in the attack.⁷⁹ Bartholomew Hussey (brother of Cornelius and Edward) were suspected of participating in the attack, as were two individuals named Edmond Healy and Jeremiah Reidy. Both Healy and Reidy were suspected of involvement in previous moonlighting activity in the region but had absconded when the P.P.P. Act came into law.⁸⁰ Quinlan, Hussey, Reidy (farm servant) and two others named John Coffey (farm servant) and Henry Williams were imprisoned for the attack in December 1881.⁸¹ In the Cordal region of Castleisland another moonlight gang were in operation. In December a large number of farmers were visited by a group of twelve to fourteen men who were disguised and were 'wearing whigs and whiskers of cow hair'.⁸² The farmers were intimidated to maintain the rent strike. During the same month, a tenant named Michael Flynn was shot in the leg. On Christmas Day six tenant farmers were visited and warned not to pay rent and arms

⁷⁶ List of warrants for arrests issued under P.P.P. Act (N.A.I., CSO P.P.P. Act carton ii).

⁷⁷ In June a labourer and process server named John McAuliffe was attacked by a gang of ten to fifteen men. McAuliffe's sister was beaten and John was shot in the arm leading to amputation, see *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 333; Outrage returns (N.A.I., CSO ICR, vol. 1).

⁷⁸ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 339.

⁷⁹ Arrests under the P.P.P. Act (N.A.I., CSO, P.P.P. Act, carton ii); Outrage report of attack on Thomas Galvin, 13 Nov. 1881 (N.L.I., H.F. Considine papers box 5, unsorted collection).

⁸⁰ Outrage report of attack on Thomas Galvin, 13 Nov. 1881 (N.L.I., H.F. Considine papers box 5, unsorted collection).

⁸¹ Lists of persons arrested under the P.P.P. Act (N.A.I., CSO P.P.P. Act, carton i).

⁸² Outrage report Dec. 1881 (N.L.I., H.F. Considine papers box 5, unsorted collection). Such disguises were similar to those used by Whiteboys in the pre-Famine period, see Beames, *Peasants and power*, pp 98-9.

demanded.⁸³ In February 1882 threatening notices appeared from ‘Captain Moonlight’ offering £50 rewards for ‘the rent-payers head’ in the Castleisland region.⁸⁴ During February and March three more tenants were shot at for paying rent in the district.

Within this context of intense agrarian violence, an unpopular local magistrate named A.E. Herbert, J.P. was attacked on 30 March 1882 and shot three times in the townland of Lissheenbawn two miles from Castleisland town.⁸⁵ His death marked the first agrarian murder in the county since the start of the Land League agitation. While acting as a magistrate, he controversially stated that if he was present at a riot that he was investigating at Brosna, he would have used buckshot on the crowd and concluded that ‘there would be no peace in the country until such people would be “skivered”’.⁸⁶ He was also a land agent in the region. D.I. Davis believed that Herbert was killed because of his position as a land agent as opposed to that of a magistrate indicating an agrarian as opposed to political motivation.⁸⁷ During a Land League meeting in July 1881 at Knockabowl Herbert was publicly condemned. During a speech it was stated that Herbert ‘would be made fly like a redshank’.⁸⁸ During another meeting of the league the suspected moonlighter and leaguer Timothy O’Connor Brosnan, referred to “skiver’em Herbert” and stated that the people were poor because of him.⁸⁹ Although Patrick Quinlan was imprisoned at the time of Herbert’s murder, he was previously involved in a planned attack on him, which fell through at the last moment.⁹⁰ The weapons used to shoot Herbert were taken in a raid on a farmer’s house in April 1881 indicating a connection between previous outrages and the murder.⁹¹ Although the police failed to arrest any of the perpetrators of the murder, it was clearly part of the systematic campaign of intimidation and violence, which was been carried out by a number of Moonlighters who had close links with local Land League figures.

⁸³ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 339. John Twiss, brother of George, was arrested and imprisoned for this attack, see, Patt Lynch, *They hanged John Twiss* (Tralee, 1982), p. 27.

⁸⁴ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 340.

⁸⁵ Return of outrages (N.A.I., CSO ICR, vol. 1).

⁸⁶ Skivered meant sliced and cut up.

⁸⁷ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 411.

⁸⁸ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 334.

⁸⁹ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 335.

⁹⁰ Donovan, *A popular history of east Kerry*, p. 102

⁹¹ *Special Commission... vol. ii*, p. 335

The next murder to be committed in Kerry was the killing of a sixty-five-year-old herd, named Patrick Cahill, who was working on an evicted farm in the Tralee district. In the Killarney region a tenant farmer named Daniel Leahy died in August after a gang of seven men armed with rifles and revolvers dragged him from his bed and shot him three times in front of his wife and stabbed him in the hip and shoulder. He had taken grazing land from an evicted farm. In October another tenant, Thomas Browne was shot dead in broad daylight at Drummulton in Castleisland.⁹²

The authorities believed that despite the suppression of the Land League, Fenians remained organised in both Tralee and Castleisland and were responsible for much of the violence. As late as October 1882 it was believed that Fenian meetings were held in both Tralee and Castleisland to elect officers and to plan outrages.⁹³ Those who perpetuated outrage ostensibly claimed to be Fenians. When a threatening letter appeared in October 1881 it warned that the 'land grabber must die...let him beware a nation curses will be on his head and Irish Fenians will be on his track and the bullet will end his days'.⁹⁴ The police believed that the upsurge in violent outrage in Castleisland corresponded with the return of a man named Kenny from America in February 1882. Kenny, whose brother Patrick, was a large tenant farmer and formerly president of the Castleisland Land League, was suspected by the police to have been closely connected to P.J. Sheridan (during this period Sheridan was travelling around Ireland disguised as a priest which aroused profound suspicions in Dublin Castle).⁹⁵ On his return to Castleisland the police believed he began orchestrating outrages.⁹⁶ In the Ballybunnion region during March 1882, a tenant named Martin Costello was shot in the leg for supposedly paying his rent. After the arrest of two individuals for the outrage, the police also charged the perpetrators with being members of a 'treasonable society, having for its object the dethronement of the Queen'.⁹⁷ During a magisterial inquiry into the attack the district inspector for the

⁹² Return of outrages (N.A.I., CSO ICR vol. 1).

⁹³ South Western Division, R.M.s' fortnightly report ending 14 Oct. 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 41261).

⁹⁴ Outrage report: threatening notice (N.A.I., CSO ILLNLP carton viii, Special Commission).

⁹⁵ For an outline of Sheridan's career, see Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp. 243-5.

⁹⁶ Report to Lord Spencer Chief secretary concerning why Castleisland is the worst district in Ireland, 14 Nov. 1883 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1883 24113).

⁹⁷ *K.E.P.*, 22 Mar. 1882.

region, Crane, stated that he was 'officially aware of a conspiracy not to pay rent and a conspiracy to establish an Irish Republic'.⁹⁸

However, the level of Fenian activity was frequently over estimated by the police. This was particularly the case in 1882 when the police apprehended a suspected moonlighter named O'Connell from Millstreet.⁹⁹ Acting as an informer, he claimed to the police that a Fenian body consisting of 1,500-1,600 members, with over 1,000 arms including dynamite, was the source of agrarian outrages in the region. He alleged that the secret society was part of a wider organisation with a hierarchical structure based on a 'district, county and national network'. He further postulated that the Land League funded the society.¹⁰⁰ The police believed that the 'information he gave was invaluable as it led to the conviction of four men... to the arrest of several and to the complete breaking up of the conspiracy'.¹⁰¹ However, four convictions was a poor return considering the claims of O'Connell and the fact that the police initially arrested thirty-two individuals based on his information. Furthermore, the police did not discover the large stores of arms, which O'Connell claimed were in existence in the area. Some of O'Connell's accusations appeared to have been unfounded. Considering he was a paid informer who received a full pardon and was later granted expenses and \$55 to immigrate to Australia may have affected the information he gave to the police.¹⁰²

The case of O'Connell depicts that the police easily labelled agrarian outrages as the work of Fenians and the Land League. However, many of the motives of the attacks during the period were based on complex personal disputes and vendettas. The three Quinlan brothers were arrested for an attack on a process server who had served a writ on their uncle. Similarly, when Laurence Quinlan was suspected of leading the attack on Galvin, the police believed that he had a personal motivation because other tenants in the townland that paid their rent were not punished.¹⁰³ The police were of the opinion that Cahill was murdered as a result of competition between him and another tenant over land,

⁹⁸ *K.E.P.*, 15 Apr. 1882.

⁹⁹ Millstreet is in county Cork but borders Kerry and was in the Roman Catholic diocese of Kerry.

¹⁰⁰ Files relating to O'Connell's case, 15 Feb. 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1883 7756).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Outrage report of attack on Thomas Galvin, 13 Nov. 1881 (N.L.I., H.F. Considine papers box 5, unsorted collection).

which he was about to take.¹⁰⁴ The murder of Thomas Brown in Drumulton in September 1882 illustrated the complexities that surrounded many agrarian outrages during the period. Shot in the middle of the day by two undisguised men, the police believed it was the work of Fenians.¹⁰⁵ Two individuals named Poff and Barrett were subsequently arrested and hanged for the murder. Poff was an evicted tenant and had been previously imprisoned for firing a shot at a caretaker of an evicted farm. However, it was popularly believed that both Poff and Barrett were innocent of the crime. The murder most probably emanated from the jealousies of two farmers after Brown bought the fee simple in their holdings, becoming the landlord to his immediate neighbours. Evidently, the murder had little to do with Fenianism and was embedded in a localised agrarian dispute concerning ownership of land. Although both Poff and Barrett maintained their innocence and they had a large amount of public sympathy, they were executed in January 1883. This further created animosity towards the authorities and greatly embittered their relations with the 'public'.¹⁰⁶

Although secret societies still existed in the county, the extremities of 1882 appeared to have quietened down by 1883. A combination of factors led to the stabilising of agrarian relations and the diffusion of the land war. Parnell's new political body, the National League, attempted to reform the leadership and isolate the radical and Fenian members. This was easily completed after the emigration of John Egan, P.J. Sheridan and Thomas Brennan to the United States. Furthermore, after the Phoenix Park murders and the extreme violence of the 'no rent' manifesto, political and agrarian violence was extremely unpopular. At a national level the leading leaders of the I.R.B. were arrested during 1883-84, which effectively rendering the movement as impotent as a revolutionary underground.¹⁰⁷ These factors led to a substantial decrease in violence leading to Captain Plunkett stating in April 1884, that the south-west in general was 'much improved' with a

¹⁰⁴ Return of outrages (N.A.I., CSO ICR, vol. i).

¹⁰⁵ South Western Division R.M.s' fortnightly police report ending 14 Oct. 1882 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1882 41261).

¹⁰⁶ For an excellent account of the Brown murder and the subsequent trial and hanging of Poff and Barrett see, Peter O'Sullivan, 'Murder at Dromulton: An incident in the land war in Kerry' (M.A. in Local History, N.U.I., Maynooth, 1996).

¹⁰⁷ Owen Magee, *The I.R.B.; the Irish republican brotherhood from the Land League to Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 2005), p. 136.

‘complete absence of serious crime’.¹⁰⁸ Secret societies still existed in Kerry during 1883-84, as demonstrated in a dynamite attack on Samuel Hussey’s residence in November. The police believed the attack was organised by figures outside the county whom had some local assistance. Furthermore, they suspected that it was part of the wider ‘dynamite conspiracy’, which consisted of a number of terrorist attacks in London.¹⁰⁹ Despite, this attack, the county remained largely peaceful by the end of 1884.

6.6: Radicalism versus moderation, 1885-86.

While 1885 witnessed the rapid development of the branch structure of the National League, the leadership of the movement attempted to maintain the organisation as a constitutional body. Despite this, agrarian issues dominated the movement at a local level.¹¹⁰ Although the Nationalist leaders temporarily shared this agrarianism in August 1885, this rapidly changed with the publication of Gladstone’s manifesto for the forthcoming general election in September. Although the manifesto did not openly declare support for home rule it did grant ‘an expression of qualified approval for “every grant to portions of the country [i.e. U.K.] of enlarged powers for the management of their own affairs”’.¹¹¹ In October, Gladstone further hinted at his propitiousness towards home rule, when he alluded that if the majority of Irish M.P.s in the new parliament were to demand large powers of self-government then the question would have to be dealt with.¹¹² This was all carried out in the context of an apparently strengthening bond between the Tories and Parnell, which served to further inflate Nationalist aspirations concerning home rule.¹¹³ During October and November the momentum of the election engulfed much of Ireland and National League county conventions were held across the country. Home rule appeared omnipresent on the political arena. By the start of

¹⁰⁸ South Western Division: monthly police report, 8 May 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1884 10846).

¹⁰⁹ Hussey, *Reminiscences of an Irish land agent*, p. 246; South Western Division: Monthly police report, Nov. 1884 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1884 26604); *Report on explosion at Edenburn, private residence of S.M. Hussey, in county Kerry, Nov. 1884*, p. 6 [C. 4289]. H.C., 1885, xiv. 927. Magee, *The I.R.B.*, p. 120.

¹¹⁰ For the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the National League in Kerry, see ch. V

¹¹¹ R.V. Comerford, ‘The Parnell era, 1883-91’ in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, VI Ireland under the Union, II 1879-1921* (Oxford, 1996), p. 60.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹¹³ Alvin Jackson, *Home rule: an Irish history, 1800-2000* (London, 2003), p. 64.

November twenty-three National League conventions were held across the country which nominated fifty-two candidates.¹¹⁴

With the re-emergence of home rule at a national level, a clash with the inherent agrarianism of the local branches of the league was inevitable. The increase in boycotting and agitation, experienced as a corollary to the upsurge in branch activity and agrarian tensions, was deleterious to the prospects of home rule. Opponents to home rule capitalised on reports of the ardent activity of the National League in implementing the 'law of the league'. As early as September, the leadership of the league moved to counter the excesses of local branches. Criticisms emerged over the practice of publishing lists of names of individuals of who failed to join branches. Furthermore, the rise in boycotting was directly related to punishments issued by local leagues to those who broke the rules of such branches. Despite the potential dangers of the implementation of the 'law of the league', the leadership still recognised the local realities of the movement but stressed moderation. An editorial of the *United Ireland* announced:

the social government of the country is to a great extent carried on by over a thousand branches and is upon the whole carried on with a tranquillity, moderation and fair play, as well as effectiveness... [such power] ought to be accompanied by a deep sense of responsibility, and a resolute determination to banish all personal spleens and petty disputes.¹¹⁵

A week later at a meeting of the central branch T.M. Healy tentatively dealt with the issue. Always the practitioner of *Realpolitik*, Healy refused to condemn boycotting. Anxious to avoid tension and possible alienation with the vital local leadership of the league, he contended that they had been the victims of freemason boycotting, which the government, civil service, railway companies and the Bank of Ireland all participated in. He claimed that the only difference was that this conspiracy was done in secret and he urged branches to follow suit and not publish names of offenders.¹¹⁶ However, Timothy Harrington, the increasingly authoritarian secretary of the central branch, chastised the extremities of the actions of local branches when he warned:

the [Organising] Committee of the National League wished to point out in the most distinct manner that they could have no sympathy with a movement to coerce men to become members of an organisation from which, if they did not

¹¹⁴ *U.I.*, 7 Nov. 1885.

¹¹⁵ *U.I.*, 19 Sept. 1885.

¹¹⁶ *U.I.*, 26 Sept. 1885.

follow out all its programme, they might at any time be expelled, and as a matter of fact were being expelled in many localities.¹¹⁷

Harrington, evidently less concerned with his popular standing than some of his peers, announced that the central branch would 'separate themselves from the action of the local branch, and if the local branch did not discontinue practices of the kind they would take steps to dissolve the local branch of the National League'.¹¹⁸ The leadership of the league utilised its hierarchical authority to prevent the excesses of boycotting. However, this contradicted the reality of local branches whose power and status depended on their ability to enforce its laws and regulations. The league courts that arose often acted as a tribunal adjudicating over local disputes, while boycotting was the lynchpin of local league power. This agrarianism was fundamental to the success of the social and economic objectives that formulated much of the activity of local branches.

The central branch was able to exert pressure on branches to maintain a moderate course. However, the biggest danger facing the leadership of the National League was the threat of an outbreak of serious agrarian outrage. From the start of the organisation, agrarian outrage and the commission of outrages were widely condemned. In Kerry outrage was denounced from National League platforms and branches resolved to act constitutionally. The impetus of this emanated from the leadership. In August 1885, Timothy Harrington sent a circular to all branches of the league instructing members to discontinue from committing outrages.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, as the National League grew in strength, outrages appeared to decrease in some regions. By October 1885 the police County Inspector for Kerry, Moriarty, believed that 'outrages have decreased in number and I am of [the] opinion such is attributable to the league leaders, who are anxious to keep down outrage for the present as far they can'.¹²⁰ The influence of radical agrarians and Fenians in the National League also appeared to be countered to some degree at a local level. As already highlighted in chapter V, clerical influence undermined such radical influences. This was evident in the Ballymacelligott branch, where local clerical figures curtailed much radical action. D.I. Davis stated:

¹¹⁷ *K.S.*, 25 Sept. 1885.

¹¹⁸ *K.S.*, 25 Sept. 1885.

¹¹⁹ South Western Division: monthly police report, Aug. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

¹²⁰ South Western Division: monthly police report, Sept. 1885 (NAI, CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

[the branch is] composed of the worst characters in the district and ripe for any mischief. Father O'Leary P.P. is constantly working to counteract the evil effects of the Ballymacelligott one and I have no doubt he has up to the present been the means of preventing a good deal of outrage which was hatched at the league rooms.¹²¹

Also, in Tralee Edward Harrington successfully sidelined radical Fenian opponents in the town's branch of the National League.¹²² A central objective of Parnellism was the ability of the moderate elements of the National League to dominate these radical forces at a local level.

The isolation of radical-Fenian elements in the movement became apparent at the county convention in November 1885 to select candidates for the general election. During the convention a number of individuals associated with radical agrarianism and Fenianism were present. William Fenix, part of the Causeway contingent, had a history of involvement in Fenian and secret society activity and had been arrested under the 1881 P.P.P. Act. Thomas Dooling attended the convention as part of the contingent of the Lixnaw branch. Although not arrested under the 1881 P.P.P. Act, he was involved with secret society activity during the National League period.¹²³ By 1890 the police believed he was an I.R.B. centre and had orchestrated the murder of a tenant named Fitzmaurice in 1888.¹²⁴ Despite Michael Power's opposition to Edward Harrington in the Tralee League, he was one of the four representatives of the branch at the convention.¹²⁵ Four leaguers represented the Castleisland League. Of the branch's contingent, both Bartholomew Hussey and Laurence Quinlan were widely associated with the perpetuation of agrarian violence and secret society activity.¹²⁶ These individuals were involved with the agrarian violence of the early 1880s and by 1885 were still connected with radical agrarianism.

The county convention was held in late November 1885 on the premises of the Christian Brothers School in Tralee town. 277 delegates attended. Sixty were members of

¹²¹ South Western Division: monthly police report, Aug. 1885 (NAI, CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

¹²² See ch. IV.

¹²³ See ch. III.

¹²⁴ File on Thomas Dooling, (P.R.O. CO/904: microfilm, N.L.I., p. 153).

¹²⁵ The other representatives of the Tralee branch included Thomas O'Rourke, Edward Harrington and Garrett Fitzgerald.

¹²⁶ As highlighted already in this chapter they were widely associated with violence during the Land League period. By 1885 Quinlan remained associated radical agrarianism, see C.I. Moriarty to Chief

the Catholic clergy, which were present as *ex-officios*. Predictably, no other religious denominations were represented at the convention. The lay delegates were representatives of the sixty local branches of the league that were in existence in the county. T.D. Sullivan and James O'Kelly, both M.P.s, chaired the meeting and acted as representatives of the central branch. Seven nominations were put forward for the four seats in the county. A lay member and a clerical member of the convention proposed W.J. O'Doherty, O'Connor, John Stack, Edward Harrington and J.D. Foley. The remaining three candidates, Michael Healy, J.D. Sheehan; president of the Killarney branch, and the Castleisland radical Laurence Quinlan, failed to receive any clerical backing and were proposed by lay members only.¹²⁷ In a private meeting, which according to the *Kerry Sentinel* passed off with the 'entire absence on anything approaching dissension in the slightest degree', Doherty, O'Connor, Stack and Harrington were all nominated as candidates for the election.¹²⁸ Only Stack and Harrington were politically indigenous to the county. Both had no past involvement in agrarian secret society activity and were committed to Parnellism. Stack was the vice-president of the Listowel National League, which was considered to be moderate. The Unionist newspaper, the *Kerry Evening Post*, commented that he 'has the reputation of being an "honest" Nationalist, a title, we may remark, given to very few in this county'.¹²⁹ The other two candidates were from outside the county. Of the nominations that failed, only J.D. Foley had any clerical backing. Foley was the most prominent organiser in the Killorglin area and was credited with organising five branches in the region.¹³⁰ A civil engineer and the son of a respectable farmer, he would most probably have been successful only for the seat was earmarked for O'Connor. Sheehan, president of the Killarney League, and a central organiser of the movement in the region, failed to get nominated for East Kerry. Although he had failed to prominently feature in the Land League, he had emerged as the most active National Leaguer in Killarney by 1885. During the Fenian rising in 1867-68 he was arrested, and by 1878-79 he was suspected by the police of promoting Fenianism in Killarney. His

Secretary's Office, 19 Oct. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1885 19125). In 1886 he was suspected of providing arms for moonlight attacks, see Murphy, *The story of Brosna*, p. 22.

¹²⁷ *K.W.R.*, 21 Nov. 1885.

¹²⁸ *K.S.*, 20 Nov. 1885

¹²⁹ *K.E.P.*, 21 Nov. 1885.

¹³⁰ *K.S.*, 16 Oct. 1885.

Fenian past may explain his failure to gain any support from the clergy at the convention.¹³¹ By 1885 he appeared to have converted to Parnellism and actively condemned outrage. His apparent transformation to moderate politics was compounded when he successfully received the candidature in December, after Doherty declared for another county. Of all the nominations Laurence Quinlan was undoubtedly the most committed radical agrarian agitator with a legacy of using physical force. Evidently, Catholic clerics and lay leaguers committed to Parnellism appeared to sideline radicals at the convention. The *Kerry Evening Post* sarcastically noted the isolation of radicals at the convention when it commented:

there is however, a powerful body in Kerry who have been treated very unfairly, and who now have a big grievance to brood over. We mean the moonlighting body, which occupies a foremost rank in the politics of the county. Their interests have been entirely overlooked, and owing to their apathy in the matter, the Kerry Moonlighters will have no staunch advocate in the House of Commons.¹³²

6.7: Agrarian violence and the National League.

Notwithstanding the attempt of much of the national and local leadership of the National League to prevent violence, inevitably agrarian outrage grew in tandem with the movement. This was illustrated in the rise of agrarian outrages committed in last six months of 1885 and 1884. The figure rose from seventy-one in 1884 to 127 for the corresponding period in 1885.¹³³ Furthermore, an analysis of the geographical location of 339 outrages recorded by the R.I.C in an eleven month period between August 1885 and June 1886, demonstrates that the prevalence of outrage corresponded with regions where the National League was most active. In all, 283 outrages were committed in the R.I.C. districts of Castleisland, Killarney, Listowel and Tralee. This area corresponded directly to regions of high National League activity (in 1885 305 out of a total of 358 branch meetings of the league in the county were held in this area).¹³⁴

¹³¹ File on J.D. Sheehan (P.R.O. CO/904: microfilm, N.L.I., p. 956).

¹³² *K.E.P.*, 21 Nov. 1885.

¹³³ *Return of number of agrarian outrages committed in Ireland reported to Inspector General of R.I.C., quarter ending 30 Sept. 1884*, pp 2-3 [C 4210], H.C. 1884-5 lxv. 13; *Return... quarter ending 31 Dec. 1884*, pp 2-3 [C 4406], H.C., 1884-5 lxiv. 17; *Return... quarter ending 30 Sept. 1885*, pp 2-3 [C 4616], H.C. 1886, liv. 13; *Return... quarter ending 31 Dec. 1885*, pp 2-3 [C 4617], H.C. 1886 liv. 17.

¹³⁴ See table 5.c, ch. V.

Table 6.c: Number of outrages committed in R.I.C. districts in county Kerry, Aug. 1885-June 1886.

R.I.C. district	Castleisland	Killarney	Listowel	Tralee	Rest	
Total	76	73	73	63	55	339

Note: Rest comprised of the R.I.C. districts of Dingle, Kenmare and Killorglin.

Source: Précis of agrarian outrages committed in Kerry, Aug. 1885-June 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1887 box 3310).

Furthermore, much of the motivation for these outrages was analogous to the objectives of local branches of the National League. A breakdown of the issues at stake behind the sample of outrages in table 6.d. illustrates this. Out of the total number of outrages committed, 105 were directly related to landlords, evicted land, rent strikes and enforcement of boycotts. These issues were central to those that the local branches of the National League attempted to control, demonstrating a widespread use of violence and intimidation to enforce the 'law of the league'. Furthermore, thirty-nine outrages were committed relating to disputes within agrarian society. Likewise, many of these issues were similar to those that came before the courts of the National League.

Although many of these outrages appeared to correspond with the objectives of the National League, the imbroglio nature of many land disputes ensured that the motives for much violence lay in complicated private disputes. The complex nature of such disputes was highlighted in an apparent moonlight raid on two tenants in the Kilcummin region in late 1885. At night four armed and disguised men forced a tenant named Denis Sullivan out of his bed. The gang demanded to see his rent book, and he was forced onto his knees to swear an oath to give up possession of a neighbouring farm from which the tenant was evicted four years previously. Although the evicted tenant had emigrated to America, the local branch of the league attempted to get O'Sullivan to give up the land. The gang also fired a shot into the roof and asked for money for gun powder. On the same night a neighbouring farmer named O'Callaghan was also attacked and shots were fired into his house. It was believed the motive for this outrage was that O'Callaghan and his sons refused to join the National League.¹³⁵ These attacks appeared to have been committed to enforce the power of the league in the region. However, O'Sullivan successfully identified two farm servants named Leary and Coakley as his attackers.

¹³⁵ Outrage report: attacks on Denis O'Sullivan and Jeremiah O'Callaghan, 16 Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1886 994)

These two servants were in the employment of two neighbouring farmers named Fleming and Courane, who had grazed the evicted farm before O'Sullivan took it. The police believed that these two farmers orchestrated the outrage to intimidate Sullivan off it and regain access to the land. They committed the attack on Callaghan in an attempt to portray the outrages as part of a wider conspiracy and hide their own motives.¹³⁶

Evidently, much agrarian outrage was derived out of personal disputes. As demonstrated by A.C. Murray, such personalised issues lay at the heart of the outbreak of Ribbonism in county Westmeath between 1868 and 1871.¹³⁷

Table 6.d: Objectives of 339 outrages committed in county Kerry, Aug. 1885-June 1886.

	Castleisland	Killarney	Listowel	Tralee	Rest	Total
<i>Landlord/ tenant relations</i>						
Against landlords	3	3	7	3	2	18
Holding evicted land	8	3	4	3	5	23
Grazing evicted land	10	4	4	1	0	19
Dealing with 'obnoxious' people	5	12	4	3	2	26
Rent strikes	3	1	7	4	3	18
<i>Other disputes</i>						
Farmer/ labourer	4	1	0	1	0	6
Disputes between farmers/family/traders	9	8	4	6	6	33
<i>Non-agrarian</i>						
Elections	3	0	0	0	0	3
Police	4	3	4	1	2	13
Robbery/ levying contributions	12	19	23	16	16	86
Other	0	5	2	8	6	21
Ordinary	15	14	14	17	13	73
<i>Total</i>	76	73	73	63	55	339

Source: Précis of agrarian outrages committed in Kerry, Aug. 1885-June 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1887 box 3310).

6.6: The murder of John O'Connell Curtin, November 1885.

The complex relationship between agrarian violence, the National League and the wider community was illuminated with the murder of a gentleman farmer named John

¹³⁶ Ibid., K.S., 6 Jan. 1886.

O'Connell Curtin in November 1885. The renewed agrarian agitation in the autumn of 1885 inevitably led to an increase in outrage. In September the county inspector for the R.I.C., Moriarty, reported that large sections of the county were disturbed. He stated that not only were the continuously disaffected regions of Castleisland, Killarney and Killorglin troublesome but that 'the spirit of lawlessness has manifested itself in portions of the Tralee district around Ardfert and Abbeydorney and the Dingle district around Castlegregory and Kilgobbin, hitherto the most tranquil in the county'.¹³⁸ The killing and stealing of cattle, demanding of money and arms, and threatening notices all occurred on a regular basis in various regions in the county. By November the level of agrarian violence led Moriarty to report to Dublin Castle: 'I do not exaggerate when I say that things generally could not possibly have been worse.... Nothing but lawlessness and sympathy with crime prevails [in] the rest of Kerry'.¹³⁹ The number of outrages reported rose from thirty-four for the month of October to forty-four in November. Of these outrages the most violent and significant was the murder of Curtin by a band of Moonlighters in Firies. Curtin was one of the largest tenant farmers in the county and had a farm of over 160 acres. He was representative of the 'gentleman farmer' class. Born in county Limerick in 1820, he was later educated at Clongowes Wood Jesuit College. In 1847 he married Agnes De Courcey, the youngest daughter of another 'gentleman farmer' in the Firies region named Maurice De Courcey.¹⁴⁰ Although never a member of the Land League, he joined the National League and was appointed as treasurer to the branch.¹⁴¹ He led the tenants of Lord Kenmare's estate, along with the president of the Firies National League, Father O'Connor, when they sought a reduction in rent from the landlord in October 1885.¹⁴² Despite the refusal of any rent reduction from Lord Kenmare and the subsequent outbreak of a general rent strike on the estate, Curtin paid his rent. Strong denunciations of those who paid rent were commonly heard at National League meetings in the lead up to the attack.¹⁴³ By breaking the rent strike Curtin had violated

¹³⁷ A.C. Murray 'Agrarian violence and Nationalist in nineteenth century Ireland: the myth of Ribbonism' in *Irish Social and Economic History*, xiii (1986), pp 56-73.

¹³⁸ South Western Division: monthly police report, Sept. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310).

¹³⁹ South Western Division: monthly police report, Oct. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310).

¹⁴⁰ Memo of Curtin's grandchild (N.L.I., Curtin papers MS 33052).

¹⁴¹ K.S., 20 Oct. 1885.

¹⁴² *Special Commission...* vol. ii, p. 220.

¹⁴³ K.S., 13 Nov. 1885.

the 'law of the league' and could have expected some form of punishment by the branch. Before the branch took any action against Curtin, the moonlight gang attacked him.

Although Curtin had broken the rent strike, the motive of the gang of Moonlighters appeared to be solely to demand guns and money. The demand for money and arms was the most common motive for outrage during this period. Out of a total of 339 outrages in which details are available for between August 1885 and June 1886 eighty-six were motivated for this purpose. Similarly, only eighteen outrages were committed in relation to rent strikes. Furthermore, Curtin was previously the target of such a raid in 1881 when he was forced to give up a gun. The practice appeared to have had a degree of legitimacy within communities. When demanding money, they frequently sought a contribution as opposed to enacting a full robbery. Furthermore, despite the extreme violence which Moonlighters often resorted to, at times they were welcomed in the houses they raided. After a moonlight raid on a number of farmers' homes in the Duagh district it was reported:

the people whose residences were visited belonged to the respectable farming class and appear to be very popular in their respective districts... the Moonlighters are said to be of the lower orders but extremely jovial. Happening upon a house where a wedding was taking place they feasted on the good things supplied to them and joined in the festivities.¹⁴⁴

The practice of groups of men dressing up in disguise and visiting neighbouring farms under the direction of a 'captain' paralleled aspects of rural customs. When a marriage occurred in a locality the younger men of the neighbourhood who didn't attend the ceremony, dressed up as 'straw men' and visited the party during the night. One contributor to the Folklore Commission from Ballyseedy, a region neighbouring Furies, described the practice:

at night the [wedding] party is surprised by a large number of straw boys called "sursufs". These are masked in different form with straw helmets. The captain took the bride for a dance. They remained for an hour singing and dancing and taking refreshments and then they left.¹⁴⁵

In 1886 a police night patrol intercepted a group who they believed were a gang of Moonlighters. After a fracas the offenders claimed they were not on a moonlight raid but

¹⁴⁴ *K.E.P.*, 12 Mar. 1886.

were attending a wedding party. At the petty sessions trial of a number of individuals arrested for the offence, it was claimed, and accepted by the judge, that the men were innocent and taking part in customs common in the area. However, the arrest of George Twiss, a known Moonlighter, on the occasion suggested a crossover in the personnel of Moonlighters and individuals who took part in such customs.¹⁴⁶ The practice of young men joining Moonlighting gangs paralleled certain accepted roles undertaken by this social group.

Moonlighting also compared to peasant festive ceremonies such as the 'wren boys' which occurred on St Stephen's Day. Commonly in the Munster region, groups of up to twenty disguised 'wren boys' visited neighbouring houses seeking money and refreshments.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the rise in moonlighting activity in late autumn and early winter corresponded with the peasant feast-day of Hallowe'en, which was 'an occasion of emotional release involving numerous customs and superstitions'.¹⁴⁸ Similar to Whiteboyism in the pre-Famine period, the activities of Moonlighters seemed linked to 'the cycle of peasant life and rural custom'.¹⁴⁹ The parallels between certain customs and Moonlight activities illustrated that Moonlighters drew on peasant practices that were common in the society that they lived in.

When the gang of Moonlighters raided Curtin's house the motive was most probably simply to seek money or arms. However, when the Moonlighters broke into his house Curtin refused to submit and defended himself by getting his gun and reportedly stated 'well now boys'.¹⁵⁰ A number of shots were fired by both parties and one of the intruders, a neighbouring farmer's son named Timothy Sullivan, was hit and killed.¹⁵¹ A melee broke out between the remaining intruders and three of Curtin's children; Lizzie, Norah and Daniel. In the tussle one of the attackers lost his disguise and two lost their guns. As the Moonlighters fled the house, Curtin went out the door after them and shouted 'be gone with you now boys'. At this point one of the attackers turned around

¹⁴⁵ Irish Folklore Commission, Ballyseedy, s 442, p. 95.

¹⁴⁶ Outrage report: assault on police in Castleisland, 22 Feb. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1886 4242).

¹⁴⁷ Alan Gailey, *Irish folk drama* (Cork, 1969), p. 81.

¹⁴⁸ Beames, 'Rural conflict in pre-Famine Ireland: peasant assassinations in Tipperary 1837-47' in *Past & Present*, no. 97 (1978), p. 85.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 86.

¹⁵⁰ *Special Commission... vol ii*, p. 220.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 221.

and shot Curtin a number of times, mortally wounding him. It was widely believed that the dead moonlighter's brother fired the shots.¹⁵²

The murder had significant repercussions for politics at a national level and quickly entered the discourse of the on-going general election campaign. *The Times* of London commented:

if the desperados cannot be restrained in Mr Harrington's own county, which has the advantage of being instructed under his special guidance in his own [news]paper, what becomes of the claim of the league to be regarded as a peaceable and constitutional body, and so well organised as to be able to control the purpose of the people and keep the Nationalist movement within legal bounds.¹⁵³

In turn, the central branch of the National League condemned the murder and offered its condolence to the Curtin family.¹⁵⁴ Nationalists, while eager to condemn the murder of Curtin also criticised what they saw as the propaganda use of it. *United Ireland* illustrated the Nationalist reaction when it stated:

Captain Moonlight has again come to the rescue of the landlord faction in their sorest need. The conspiracy to represent the country as in a state of veiled massacre had completely collapsed.... At this dismal moment the abominable slaughter at Castlefarm in Kerry cropped up in the nick of time to cheer the drooping spirits of the landlord defence union and to give Dr Patton another convenient text for preaching to England that ours is a race of incurable barbarians, and that to hand over the control of the police to such a nation would be to give the sword of justice to the masked monsters who brought death and horror upon O'Connell Curtin's peaceful home.¹⁵⁵

While the murder entered the rhetoric of the general election, the situation quickly deteriorated within the Firies region. The killing of one of the Moonlighters and the subsequent identification of a number of the attackers by the children, created a groundswell of antagonism towards the Curtin family. A large amount of support for the killed Moonlighter was apparent in the Firies region. At a branch meeting of the Firies National League, a vote of condolence was offered to the mother of the dead Moonlighter. A collection of £35 was gathered for her in 'a number of hours' and the

¹⁵² Memo of Curtin's grandchild (N.L.I., Curtin papers, MS 33,052).

¹⁵³ *The Times*, 16 Nov. 1885.

¹⁵⁴ *K.S.*, 20 Nov. 1885.

¹⁵⁵ *U.I.*, 21 Nov. 1885.

branch called on neighbouring parishes to follow suit.¹⁵⁶ Bitterness over the shooting of O'Sullivan quickly emerged. Curtin's funeral was poorly attended. When the local curate, Father Murphy, attempted to speak highly of Curtin uproar followed in the church.¹⁵⁷ The Curtin family became the target of boycotting and intimidation. Curtin's daughter, Lizzie, stated that whenever the family drove on the roads 'we were hooted and booed and called murders and informers and all sorts of things as we drove along'.¹⁵⁸ The situation reached fever point when the arrested Moonlighters were convicted at the Cork Winter Assizes, largely on the evidence of Curtin's daughters, in late December 1885. The boycotting against the family became extensive and all the servants in their employment left them. In one case, a herd who had worked for the family for the previous thirty-two years stated he was too afraid to remain in the family's employment.¹⁵⁹ In January 1886, the family suffered serious intimidation while attending Sunday mass. The R.I.C. reported the following incident in the local church in January 1886:

as the young [Curtin] ladies passed up through the chapel a derisive cheer was raised by six or eight shameless girls who on this as well as on other occasions take advantage of their sex in misconducting themselves, believing that the police wont interfere with them. Though the parish priest was in the chapel while this was going on he never uttered a word in condemnation.¹⁶⁰

After the mass the Curtin family were booed and rushed at by a crowd. Despite the intimidation the District Inspector for the region, Crane, believed that after these events the 'family [were] more determined than ever not to give their provocateurs the satisfaction of hunting them out of the country'.¹⁶¹ The Curtins again attended mass the following Sunday, but this time protected by twenty-five policemen. They were accompanied by the Quaker Nationalist and member of the Organising Committee of the National League, Alfred Webb. During mass the parish priest and prominent leaguer, Fr O'Connor, read a letter from the bishop warning the parishioners that further scenes similar to the previous week would lead to the suspension of service in the church. Despite the bishop's warning, after mass the Curtin family were again booed and hissed

¹⁵⁶ *K.S.*, 24 Nov. 1885.

¹⁵⁷ *Special Commission... vol ii*, p. 221.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 222.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 224.

¹⁶⁰ Outrage report: proceedings at Firies, 26 Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1886 1752).

¹⁶¹ South Western Division: monthly police report, Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310)

by sections of the congregation leading to stone throwing and police intervention. When the Curtin family left the grounds, Alfred Webb attempted to address the crowd. After being introduced by Fr O'Connor, Webb began to state that the Curtin family had every right to defend themselves on the night of the killings at which 'he got hooted and [was] glad enough to get away'.¹⁶² Later Webb revealed that he felt his 'life would not have been worth much but for the police'.¹⁶³ During Webb's speech a number of women took the Curtin's family pew from inside the church and proceeded to smash it into pieces.¹⁶⁴ After these disturbing scenes the bishop carried out his threat and mass at Firies church was suspended.¹⁶⁵

The events in Firies and in other parts of Kerry were constantly in the focus of the wider national media and debate on home rule. In turn, the leadership of the league attempted to curtail the excesses in the Firies region. When the president of the branch, Fr O'Connor, sought to gain money from the central branch to fund litigation between tenants and landlords, Timothy Harrington refused. He stated that Curtin's murder: 'has shocked the whole civilised world, and must do incalculable injury to the cause of the people in the district'.¹⁶⁶ A number of months later the same branch applied for grants for evicted tenants in the region. Similarly, Harrington denied the request stating that the central branch was

compelled to refuse a grant, owing to the very disturbed and lawless state of Kerry at the present time. The committee decided upon sending no grants to those districts where continual disturbance has been kept up. I do not wish you to understand that they believe the branch of the National League is in any way associated with lawless outrages, but they wish to save the general organisation from even the suspicion of sending funds to places where outrages of this kind have been occurring.¹⁶⁷

Sections of the movement within the county also attempted to distance the league from the actions in Firies. At the county convention in November resolutions were passed

¹⁶² Outrage report: proceedings at Firies, 26 Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1886 1752).

¹⁶³ Maire-Louise Legg, *Alfred Webb: the autobiography of a Quaker Nationalist* (Cork, 1999), p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ *K.S.*, 26 Jan. 1886.

¹⁶⁵ *K.S.*, 2 Feb. 1886.

¹⁶⁶ Harrington to O'Connor, 19 Nov. 1885 (N.L.I., Harrington papers, MS 9454, letter book, no. 15).

¹⁶⁷ Harrington to Jeremiah McMahon, 5 Feb. 1886 (N.L.I., Harrington papers, MS 9454, letter book, no. 28).

condemning the attack on Curtin.¹⁶⁸ In February, the newly elected M.P. for East Kerry, J.D. Sheehan, warned the people of Firies: 'if you wish to cripple the action of the Irish Party, it is only by the repetition of those unseemly acts that you can impede the progress they are making'.¹⁶⁹ Despite this extensive pressure from both the county and national leadership of the movement, influential sections of the community in Firies continued the hostility towards the Curtin family. In 1887 the family continued to be extensively boycotted. Curtin's wife, Agnes, told a reporter that 'I can never live here in peace but they won't let me go. I tried to sell it [farm] at auction but notices were posted that any purchaser would get the same treatment as old Curtin'.¹⁷⁰ The depth of animosity towards the Curtin family was demonstrated in comments made by 'widow' Casey, the mother of one of the men arrested and sent on penal servitude for the offence. She stated: 'if those boys did that thing they merely went for arms; a foolish thing, but it has been done throughout Ireland, and is done today.... As long as I am alive and my children and their children live, we will try to root the Curtins out of the land, now I will do it. Wasn't the young man more the equal to that old codger?'¹⁷¹ The Curtin family eventually left Firies in 1888 receiving a price that amounted to half the farm's value.¹⁷²

The Curtin murder and the occurrences that followed demonstrated the paradox of agrarian violence and its relationship with not just the broader league movement but also with local communities. The moonlight attack may have been in response to Curtin paying his rent, an act that was condemned by the Firies League the previous week. However, the incident was more probably a regular moonlight raid for money and weapons. Such attacks drew on certain customs integral to rural society and at times appeared to have had a degree of legitimacy within such communities. This was demonstrated by the widespread hostility exhibited towards the Curtin family after the killing of one of the attackers and the subsequent prosecution of two others. The intimidation that developed towards the Curtin family indicated the power of those who supported and sympathised with the Moonlighters. This feeling resisted attempts by both the regional and national leadership of the league and the religious authorities to stop the

¹⁶⁸ *K.S.*, 20 Nov. 1885.

¹⁶⁹ *K.S.*, 2 Feb. 1886.

¹⁷⁰ George Pellew, *In castle and cabin or talks in Ireland in 1887* (London, 1888), p. 137.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

hostility towards the Curtin family. Furthermore, it appeared to be based on a complex combination of intimidation and popular support.

6.8: Contradiction of home rule and agrarian violence.

After the parliamentary party's success in the general election of December 1885, and Parnell's subsequent coalition with Gladstone, the granting of home rule was a realistic aspiration. In turn, Parnell vitally needed to contain the on-going agrarian agitation in rural Ireland. However, the agitation intensified during January 1886 as landlords attempted to break the rent strikes, which had been underway since the previous September. *United Ireland* commented: 'we regard the state of Ireland from an agrarian point of view to be as serious today as ever it was during the century'.¹⁷³ In particular, the situation was deteriorating in Kerry. During the quarter sessions in Killarney alone 230 ejectment notices for non-payment of rent were granted.¹⁷⁴ Tensions were further exacerbated with a number of evictions. In the continually disturbed Firies region, a number of evictions took place in early January which were marked by widespread demonstrations. During the eviction of Billy Daly of Droumraig, a tenant on the Kenmare estate, 200 police and troops were at hand. As the eviction party approached the tenant's house, the blowing of horns was commenced 'which were heard in every direction and attracted large crowds of people of both sexes'. Stone throwing followed and the Riot Act was read as the police dispersed the crowd with force.¹⁷⁵ The January evictions increased agrarian tensions and the county inspector, Moriarty, commented that they 'tended to a great extent in further inflaming the minds of the people'.¹⁷⁶ Within the atmosphere of increased agrarian tensions, outrages continued during the month. A gang of fifteen to twenty Moonlighters forcibly obtained four guns and one revolver from a number of farmers in the Listowel region. Similarly, armed men entered the houses of a number of farmers and demanded guns in the Crotta area which neighboured Tralee. Cattle stealing continued in Castleisland. The most serious outrage during January occurred in Castlegregory where a seventy two-year-old process server of writs for eviction, named

¹⁷² *Special Commission...*, vol. ii.

¹⁷³ *U.I.*, 16 Jan. 1886.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *K.S.*, 8 Jan. 1886.

Giles Rae, had an ear 'sliced' off by a gang of Moonlighters. The Divisional Commissioner for the south-west, Captain Plunkett, reported that 'in Kerry the districts of Dingle, Killarney, Listowel and Tralee are in a most lawless state'.¹⁷⁷ In north Kerry, a new wave of rent strikes emerged in January of 1886. George Sandes, a notorious land agent that managed a number of properties in the area, refused to meet the demands of tenants in reducing the spring rents.¹⁷⁸ In turn, a widespread rent strike emerged in the north Kerry region further increasing tensions.

The relationship of the National League with this violence is difficult to ascertain. In the Killarney region the district inspector firmly believed that the league orchestrated outrages. In January 1886 he reported: 'it is idle to think the National League discourages outrage. It does not except in words.... The National League and the perpetrators [of outrages] are all one'.¹⁷⁹ A month later he was of the same opinion and believed that the influence of the league had 'rendered the detection of crime an utter impossibility'.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, after an increase in outrages in the Listowel region the district inspector commented: 'I entirely attribute nearly all the serious outrages recently perpetrated in this district to the evil teachings of the National League'.¹⁸¹ The representatives of landlordism also believed that the league was responsible for outrage. Maurice Leonard, the land agent on the Kenmare estate, wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* claiming that all the members of the Kilcummin branch were active Moonlighters.¹⁸² The use of violence to enforce the laws of the league was particularly evident in the practice of cattle maiming and killing, which emerged in Castleisland in the latter half of 1885. In the Castleisland R.I.C. district sixty evicted farms existed on which landlords and organisations such as the Land Corporation attempted to stock cattle on. In turn, a campaign of stealing and cutting up cattle on such evicted land was orchestrated to counter the landlords' actions. The Quinlans of Farran were apparently involved in the practice, and when cattle stocked on an evicted farm by the Land Corporation went missing in October 1885, the hides and entrails of the animals were found in a cave on

¹⁷⁶ South Western Division: monthly police report, Dec. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1887/ box 3310).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ *Cowper commission: evidence...*, p. 533.

¹⁷⁹ South Western Division: monthly police report, Dec. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

¹⁸⁰ South Western Division: monthly police report, Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

¹⁸¹ South Western Division: monthly police report, Apr. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

the family's farm.¹⁸³ The police believed that because the practice didn't endanger human life it 'is probably countenanced by the higher branch of the organisation [National League]. It has hitherto been planned and carried out in safety, it has not involved any tax on the people, and it is most injurious to the landlords'.¹⁸⁴ The police were of the opinion that the motives of such attacks were not just to uphold the agitation, but also out of 'the desire to become possessed of the meat'.¹⁸⁵ Notwithstanding this, the practice appeared to have been supported in the Castleisland region to the extent that the D.I., Davis, informed his superiors:

the whole community are in league to have reprisals from any person be he landlord or tenant who interferes with or attempts to derive any benefit from a farm from which a tenant has been evicted. The times are bad and persons having such farms will not pay a proper class of caretaker.... They have thrown the whole thing on the police, who for the past six months have acted more in the capacity of herds than policemen and the result is that the men are becoming completely worn out, disgusted with their duty and demoralised.¹⁸⁶

This form of outrage also emerged in the Listowel region where in October 1885 six bullocks went missing from a farm. No trace of the cattle could be found and the police believed that 'this class of outrage is becoming prevalent in this parish and is most difficult to prevent, as the ill disposed can watch their opportunity to take the cattle over which a constant watch could not be kept, except by a very much larger force of police than is available'.¹⁸⁷ Significantly, cattle stealing appeared to be another method to enforce the National League policy of boycotting of evicted farms.

Despite this increased agrarianism at a local level, the political pendulum further swung towards constitutionalism and home rule. By the end of January Parnell attempted to curtail all agrarianism in Ireland. On 21 January 1886 he told the House of Commons that tenants were combining to resist payment of rents but claimed that these movements were spontaneous and had received neither encouragement nor financial assistance from the National League. He declared that the Irish Party was doing all in their power to

¹⁸² *K.S.*, 16 Mar. 1886.

¹⁸³ South Western Division: monthly police report, Oct. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887, box 3310).

¹⁸⁴ South Western Division: monthly police report, Sept. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887/ box 3310).

¹⁸⁵ Outrage report, cattle stealing, 20 Mar. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1886 6279).

¹⁸⁶ South Western Division: monthly police report, 1 Dec. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887/ box 3310).

¹⁸⁷ Outrage report, cattle stealing, 17 Nov. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1885 22707).

stamp out boycotting and curb anti-rent combinations.¹⁸⁸ Despite the differences within the Nationalist movement, Parnell secured support for home rule over agrarianism by assuring the party that he 'had parliament in the hollow of his hand'.¹⁸⁹ Parnell appeared to succeed in expending agrarian concerns for the cause of home rule when the radical parliamentarian, John Dillon, publicly stated that restraint and silence within the movement was vital. He proclaimed that farmers and labourers would have to make sacrifices for the success of home rule.¹⁹⁰ Correspondingly, when newly elected M.P.s arrived back from London after attending the House of Commons and meetings of the Irish Party, they severely condemned outrage. Speaking at the Killarney branch of the League the East Kerry M.P., J.D. Sheehan appealed to the people 'to desist once and for all from those foolish and senseless outrages'. He contended that if they continued they would 'tie our hands and wreck us and cripple and damage the National League which embraces a plank for legislative independence as well as land reform'.¹⁹¹ The central branch continued to threaten branches that were involved in issues that had potential extreme outcomes. When in late January 1886 the Glenbeigh branch of the league consulted the central branch over a dispute concerning land Timothy Harrington warned:

we must take strong measures to put an end to the discussion of extreme subjects of this kind in our local branches.... I am directing the presidents not to receive any notices upon discussions of this kind; and if these instructions not be carried out, we shall deem it our duty immediately to dissolve any such branches. Strong measures of this kind are absolutely necessary, if the great cause of the country is to be allowed to succeed.¹⁹²

Soon after, he similarly warned the Knocknagoshel National League when the branch published a resolution threatening anyone who didn't join the movement. Harrington excoriated the branch for publishing such a resolution that would 'do the organisation and the national cause serious injury.... We [central branch] are determined to suppress branches that are a danger to the organisation'.¹⁹³ Furthermore, the central

¹⁸⁸ Geary, *Plan of Campaign*, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ O'Day, *First home rule episode*, p. 149.

¹⁹⁰ O'Day, *First home rule episode*, p. 150.

¹⁹¹ *K.S.*, 2 Feb. 1886.

¹⁹² Timothy Harrington to J.J. Griffin, 27 Jan. 1886 (N.L.I., Harrington papers, MS 9454, letter book, no. 20).

¹⁹³ Timothy Harrington to J.J. Greaney, 28 Jan. 1886 (N.L.I., Harrington papers, MS 9454 letter book, no. 21).

branch began to stop sending grants for evicted tenants to local leagues. The Scartaglin branch of the league failed to receive any reply from the central branch after applying for a number of grants.¹⁹⁴ The central branch appeared to have succeeded in curtailing branches to some extent. In early March, the Killorglin branch resolved to only meet on a monthly basis on the grounds that 'in such an emergency [home rule] silence is recommended to us as good'.¹⁹⁵ The district inspector for the region commented on the decrease in activity of the five league branches in his vicinity. He stated:

the executive hardly ever meet now, owing to the central branch having directed that the present branches were to meet as seldom as possible and to refrain from topics that might provoke discussion when they did meet and that if divisions did unfortunately prevail in any branch on any subject they were not to meet at all.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, branches attempted to prevent outrages. The Firies branch resolved to 'fight within the lines of the constitution, felonious landlordism'.¹⁹⁷ After a moonlight raid resulted in the robbery of money 'under the guise of Nationalism' in Ballyhar, the local branch condemned the action and offered £5 from the funds of the branch to bring the culprits to the police authorities.¹⁹⁸ The Duagh branch resolved: 'we deplore the infatuation of those misguided and reckless men who are, as far as in their power, propping up the enemies of this country, by taking arms, or doing any other act that could be termed an outrage'.¹⁹⁹ The Castleisland branch, renowned for its radicalism, further condemned outrage when it stated that 'the person who committed a crime now meant to ruin this poor and unfortunate country'.²⁰⁰ Similarly, the Ballyferriter branch criticised all outrage and resolved that 'the branches of the league in these districts should exert their whole influence against the commission of these dastardly acts'.²⁰¹

Despite these attempts, outrages continued to be committed to a significant extent. Many individuals associated with moonlighting ignored the extensive political pressure to prevent outrages. Michael Davitt, on behalf of the central branch of the league, spoke in

¹⁹⁴ *K.S.*, 5 Feb. 1886.

¹⁹⁵ *K.S.*, 12 Mar. 1886.

¹⁹⁶ South Western Division: monthly police report, Mar. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1887 box 3310).

¹⁹⁷ *K.S.*, 19 Jan. 1886.

¹⁹⁸ *K.S.*, 5 Feb. 1886.

¹⁹⁹ *K.S.*, 12 Feb. 1886.

²⁰⁰ *K.S.*, 19 Feb. 1886.

²⁰¹ *K.S.*, 12 Mar. 1886.

Castleisland town in February 1886 to condemn violence. The police reported his ineffectiveness when it was stated: '[Davitt] denounced outrages in very strong terms but there were very few persons in attendance at the meeting-about 500-and most of the bad boys went away while he was denouncing them. I am afraid at some of the districts are not under control'.²⁰² In the Killorglin region the district inspector commented in March 1886, that despite the decrease in league activity, the region continued in a lawless state. This was 'owing to the operation of a regular organised gang which it is almost impossible to break up'. He believed that the people were 'afraid of their lives' to give the police the slightest information concerning the secret society.²⁰³ During the same month the district inspector in Listowel contended that a new secret society 'exists for the perpetration of crime and that it has been extensively joined by farmers' sons and on pain of death to carry out the orders of the heads of the society'.²⁰⁴

By the start of 1886 it was apparent that the national leadership and sections of the local leadership of the National League had little control over the actions of secret agrarian societies. This reality was recognised by Captain Plunkett, when he reported:

no doubt for some time past the National League have used their best endeavours to put a stop to outrage but they have only partially succeeded.... The younger members of the community are so thoroughly demoralised that they are beyond control, besides which, they know that the denunciation of crime lately is only because it appears to suit the purposes of the National League at present having regard to the all important measures soon to be discussed in Parliament.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, within league branches power struggles between radical and moderate influences were common. In the Castleisland branch the police believed that 'some of the worst characters in the Castleisland branch of the National League have left in consequence of Archdeacon Irwin curbing them so much' and that they would in turn form their own league.²⁰⁶ During the controversial incidents in Firies it was evident that influences, out of the control of the leadership of the local league, were behind much of the intimidation of the Curtin family. The parish priest and president of the National League, Fr O'Connor, was the most prominent leaguer in the region during the upheaval.

²⁰² South Western Division: monthly police report, Feb. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1887 box 3310).

²⁰³ South Western Division: monthly police report, Mar. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ South Western Division: monthly police report, Feb. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310).

However, the treatment received by the Curtin family was completely out of his control. During the mass when he read the bishops letter threatening closure of the church, he told the congregation that while he was ‘on their side and was never on the side of landlords, agents or bailiffs... [and] that he considered that the Curtins had done the wrong [but] that the people of Firies should bear with the wrong’. Furthermore, he pleaded with the people to show Christian faith towards the Curtin family.²⁰⁷ His attempts at restraint failed. O’Connor later revealed he couldn’t pass a resolution condemning Moonlighters at league meetings out of fear of being attacked.²⁰⁸ Edward Harrington claimed that in areas where agrarian outrage was common the National League was never at its strongest. He believed that ‘in some of those districts there must have been some other feeling-possibly some moonlight or secret society-and the league used not to get a grips in those districts at all’.²⁰⁹ Within the Dingle branch tensions between moderate and radical influences led to the suppression of the league by the central branch. In 1886 the secretary of the branch, M.W. Murphy, a publican from Dingle town, complained to Timothy Harrington that members of the league were enforcing boycotting for ‘any or every cause’ and that the branch was ‘ruled by force rather than reason’.²¹⁰ Murphy represented moderate Nationalists that were loyal to Parnellism and informed Harrington that he only joined the movement for ‘the national cause’. On the advice of Murphy, Harrington dissolved the Dingle branch of the National League in September 1886.²¹¹ An editorial of the *Kerry Sentinel* described what it believed was the relationship radicals had with local branches of the National League. It stated: ‘fanatics are more formidable than ordinary disciples... it is certain three of these men in a branch make their influence more felt than the remaining three hundred’.²¹² Throughout the Land League period it appeared that local agrarian secret society activity was organised by one or two of the leading members of each branch with little else involvement from the rest of the local leadership. During the National League period, this was some way accepted by the leadership of the movement

²⁰⁶ South Western Division: monthly police report, Dec. 188 (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1887 box 3310).

²⁰⁷ Outrage report: proceedings at Firies, 26 Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1886 1752).

²⁰⁸ *Special Commission... vol ix*, p. 59.

²⁰⁹ *Special Commission... vol vii*, p. 560.

²¹⁰ W.M. Murphy to Timothy Harrington, 20. July 1886; Murphy to Harrington, 30. Aug. 1886 (N.L.I., Harrington papers, MS 8933[5]). Extracted from Lucey, *The Irish National League in Dingle*, pp 35-36.

²¹¹ Harrington to Murphy, 1 Sept. 1886 (N.L.I., *National League Letter Book*, letter number 106).

²¹² *K.S.*, 5 Feb. 1886.

and arguably seen as an integral element of the agitation. By 1885 agrarian violence did emerge in parallel with the National League indicating that at the very least it was utilised to some extent to enforce the 'law of the league'. Furthermore, individuals long associated with radical agrarianism remained in the leading positions in many local branches indicating that such forces remained a powerful and influential presence at a local level. The developments of home rule at a 'high level' positioned these forces in direct confrontation with Parnellism and moderate influences at a local level. Invariably, as the Curtin murder and the subsequent occurrences in the Firies region and the continuance of outrages generally demonstrated, radical agrarianism continued.

A central reason for the failure of local league figures to control the activities of secret agrarian societies lay in class divisions. In pre-Famine Ireland agrarian violence was extensively used to defend customary rights.²¹³ Much of this violence, particularly the Whiteboys movement that was prominent in the south of Ireland, was the mode of protest of the smaller tenants and those on the fringes of rural society. Whiteboys were solely the social expression of this class, with no direction and allegiance from dissident gentry or bourgeoisie.²¹⁴ However, the emergence of the land war appeared to politicise such violent agrarian agitators under the leadership of a radical middle class against landlordism. As already depicted 'radical' and 'moderate' influences vied for power within local branches. However, these disputes were not necessarily class based and many figures that were closely related to radical agrarian activity were largely drawn from the middle-class leadership of the league. Individuals such as Michael Power (pig merchant) in Tralee, Laurence Quinlan in Castleisland, and Timothy Dooling in Lixnaw (both Dooling and Quinlan were the sons of middle to large farmers) were all pivotal to the leadership of their respective branches as well as being widely suspected of involvement in the commission of outrages.

While such personnel provided much of the leadership to agrarian secret societies, the rank and file of Moonlighters was invariably drawn from the lower classes of the agrarian order. A number of cases where Moonlighters were successfully apprehended by the police illuminate the agrarian society from which these individuals were drawn. In

²¹³ Clark, *Social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 70.

²¹⁴ Beames, *Peasants and power*, pp 55-62.

January 1886, a gang of Moonlighters attacked the house of a farmer named Patrick Doyle at Brida in the Killorglin region. Doyle, along with his sons fought the attackers, and was later able to identify them. The police arrested nine individuals believed to have made up the raiding party. All were under the age of thirty, with two of the nine under twenty-five years of age. Of the party, five were farmers' sons, two were servant boys and one was a labourer and another, a cabinet-maker. Six of the group (four were brothers) had worked together the previous week shearing sheep on a farm. The six shared two beds in one dwelling room illustrating the harsh living conditions of the culprits. The police believed they were the 'most celebrated gang of desperadoes in Kerry.'²¹⁵ In February 1886, the police arrested nineteen individuals in the region of Cordal on the suspicion of moonlighting. Cordal, which neighboured Castleisland, witnessed a high level of secret society activity during the period. The entire group besides three was under the age of thirty while four were teenagers. The remaining twelve were all aged between twenty and thirty years. Nine were farmers' sons, seven were labourers and three were small artisans (one tailor, a mason and a carpenter).²¹⁶ Small artisans were arrested on a number of other occasions for secret society activity. In April 1886, two shoemakers were arrested after they were recognised as part of a gang, which raided a farmer's house in Gortatlea located between Tralee and Castleisland.²¹⁷ Another moonlighter, named Patrick Moynihan, brought before the Spring Assizes in Tralee for attacking the house of a games-keeper at Inch in the Dingle region gave his occupation as a weaver.²¹⁸

Socially these individuals were drawn from a class of small artisans, labourers and farmers' sons whose life chances were limited by the 1880s. The 1870s witnessed a sharp decrease in marriage opportunities for the average male in Kerry. As Joseph Lee has demonstrated age at marriage increased more rapidly than in any other county during this period. Between 1871 and 1881 the number of unmarried males in Kerry aged between 20-29 rose twenty-seven percent compared with seven per cent in Munster. In the Listowel Poor Law Union alone, the number of married men in this group declined by

²¹⁵ Outrage report. Raid on Doyle of Brida, 12 Jan. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1886 763).

²¹⁶ Outrage report: assault on police, 22 Feb. 1886 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1886 4242).

²¹⁷ *K.S.*, 16 Apr. 1886.

²¹⁸ *K.S.*, 16 Mar. 1886.

forty percent.²¹⁹ Furthermore, the system of late marriages left those farmers' sons who were actually going to inherit dissatisfied with a system which required that they often remained 'boys', subservient to their fathers until they finally married.²²⁰ Denied marriage opportunity, this group also had little access to land. The increased unwillingness of farmers towards the subdivision of holdings left non-inheriting sons landless. In November 1886 Canon Griffin described to the Cowper Commission the predicament of those who undertook moonlighting:

I do not know what is to be done with the children of the farming classes that are growing up, because the lands cannot be sub-divided, and then they are disconnected when they are not marrying as they used.... The eldest is not as dissatisfied as the others, because he thinks he is to get the land by and by, but there are three or four others, the younger members of the family, who are by no means satisfied, and one thing with another they do not see why they should work when there is no final benefit in prospect for them.

He believed that such individuals along with 'those who have no stake in the country, and a few of them small artisans, such as shoemakers, and servant boys', were the principal participants in boycotting and moonlight raids.²²¹ Other witnesses to the commission gave similar evidence. A large tenant farmer named James Sullivan, who held a hundred acres with a government valuation of £82, claimed that the 'respectable' classes would like a return to law and order. He described those who committed agrarian outrages as: 'the young fellas that do it. No sensible man takes any part in it'.²²² Another large farmer with eighty acres from the Castleisland region (his name was not publicised at the commission) contended that Moonlighters were 'reckless careless fellows, who have nothing to lose, who maraud from place to place. They have nothing else to do.'²²³ Similar sentiments were echoed in the *Kerry Sentinel* in February 1886 when the newspaper attempted to explain the on-going moonlight activity. It stated that 'the greater number of moonlighting outrages are committed by unemployed labourers and young sons indicating that they are not wholly due to agrarian causes... [the activities] are only

²¹⁹ Joseph Lee. *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 82.

²²⁰ Donnelly, *The land and people of nineteenth century Cork*, p. 250.

²²¹ *Cowper commission... evidence...*, p. 520.

²²² *Cowper commission...evidence...*, p. 530-1.

²²³ *Ibid*, p. 540.

moonlight robberies and mischievous freaks of unemployed labourers'.²²⁴ A number of years later, Edward Harrington maintained this view when asked at the Special Commission who were the Moonlighters. He replied: 'I presume they would be the class of people, working men and poor men, who under the influence of drink, or under any other influence, might be bought into it [secret society].'²²⁵ He was also of the opinion that 'the people generally speaking-the respectable people of the country-were in great terror of the Moonlighters'.²²⁶

The middle aged and middle class leadership of the National League chastised Moonlighters as a result of the league's failure to control agrarian violence during the critical home rule stage. The failure of the Moonlighters to conform to the objectives of the increasingly constitutional National League led to them being branded as 'unrespectable' and traitors to Ireland. The inability of the league to penetrate the minds of Moonlighters appeared to have been based on a number of issues. The league provided middle to large tenant farmers with an avenue to further their socio-economic status within their own localised communities. The leading positions in branches were largely confined to the 'respectable' middle classes, a situation that was compounded by the official recognition of the role of the Catholic clergy in the movement. In contrast to the middle aged, land holding and 'respectable' officers of local leagues, Moonlighters were young and landless. Indeed the demand for arms and money seemed to be perpetrated against the very class that the local leadership of the league encompassed. In April 1886, a moonlight party comprised of twenty-five to thirty armed and disguised men raided a number of houses in the townland of Droumcrunnig in north Kerry.²²⁷ The gang visited twelve households in one night. Of these households that were raided, six had a government valuation between £20-29 while four were valued between £30 and £39. Only two of the tenants raided had a valuation under £20.²²⁸ Another moonlight instance in Kerries in the hinterland of Tralee further illustrates that Moonlighters frequently targeted larger tenants when searching for arms and money. During April 1886 a disguised and armed party of up to twenty Moonlighters got eight guns from a number of

²²⁴ *K.S.*, 21 Feb. 1886.

²²⁵ *Special Commission... vol viii*, p. 535.

²²⁶ *Special Commission... vol viii*, p. 535.

²²⁷ *K.E.P.*, 10 Apr. 1886.

farmers in the region.²²⁹ Out of five households visited in one night all the tenants raided had holdings valued at above £50 while one, William Barrett, had a tenant farm valued at £149.²³⁰ These were invariably some of the wealthiest tenants in the county.

Correspondingly when a number of tenants were raided in the parishes of Kilmeaney and Knockanure in north Kerry it was reported that 'the people whose houses were visited belonged to the respectable farming class.... The Moonlighters are said to have been of the lower order'.²³¹ The contrast in social status between those who committed moonlighting and those who were subject to raids suggests at some level a degree of tension between the two groups.

These tensions could also have easily have emanated from age differences and the more innate conservatism of older tenant farmers. The secretary of the Killarney National League, 'a respectable auctioneer', described to a reporter this issue as:

when moonlighting first began it was difficult not to sympathise with some outrages that were excited by injustice.... Individually, leaguers sympathised at first with these young fellows but now they are absolutely opposed to any outrage, as they sure of getting their ends by legal methods.²³²

Indeed, divisions existed between the younger and older members of families. This was prevalent in the Quinlan family in Farran, Castleisland. After the P.P.P. Act was introduced in 1881 their father, Maurice, refused the three Quinlan brothers money to escape to America leading to their imprisonment.²³³ Maurice Quinlan was a 'respectable farmer' with a long history in Nationalist politics tracing back to the 1872 home rule by-election when he was a public supporter of Blennerhassett.²³⁴ By 1882 the local R.I.C. commented that 'though Quinlans sons [are] very bad characters, Maurice Quinlan himself is a very respectable man'. He also gave the police 'information' concerning the

²²⁸ Valuation records, County Kerry (Valuation Office, Dublin).

²²⁹ *K.S.*, 20 Apr. 1886.

²³⁰ Valuation records, County Kerry, (Valuation Office, Dublin).

²³¹ *K.S.*, 12 Mar. 1886.

²³² Pellew, *In castle and cabin*, pp 132-3.

²³³ Arrests under the P.P.P. Act (N.A.I. CSO P.P.P. Act, carton i).

²³⁴ *TC*, 6 Feb. 1872. Maurice Quinlan is listed as attending a pro-Blennerhassett election demonstration in Castleisland.

murder of Herbert in 1882.²³⁵ Undoubtedly the younger generation of farmers' sons were prone to more radical action than the older land holding generation.

Furthermore, the Moonlighters appeared to have been rooted in local communities and networks based on personal relationships such as families and co-workers. Much of the violence committed in the Castleisland area originated from the younger members of neighbouring families, the Quinlans and Husseys, who were also related. As we have seen, nine young men, six of who had spent the previous week labouring together on a farm and living in the same accommodation, committed the moonlight attack on Patrick Doyle. Furthermore, the familiarity between moonlighting and certain peasant customs illustrates that these gangs acted to some extent as a dynamic for the interaction of young male members of agrarian society. Similar to those who joined the I.R.A. in county Cork during the revolutionary period: 'the "boys" who "strawed", played, worked, and grew up together became the "boys" who drilled, marched, and raided together'.²³⁶

6.9: Moonlighters and republicanism.

Despite the differences between Moonlighters and the leadership of the league, Moonlighters appeared to have a powerful influence within their local communities. The actions in Firies demonstrated that large sections of the population sympathised with the dead Moonlighter and the individuals who were subsequently prosecuted for the killing of Curtin. This popular feeling for Moonlighters was apparent on a number of other occasions. When the crown solicitor, Murphy, went to a magisterial inquiry in Killorglin town after the arrest of a number of the Moonlighters he was going to 'remain there until the inquiry closed but having been twice "interviewed" and observing that a concourse of people remained about the court house, displaying their sympathy with the defendants when the opportunity occurred' he returned to Tralee.²³⁷ Considine, the R.M. for large parts of north Kerry, believed that 'a very widespread sympathy of an undefined

²³⁵ Report on Maurice Quinlan: Hill to Considine R.M. Nov. 1882 (N.L.I., H.F Considine papers, unsorted collection).

²³⁶ Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its enemies: Violence and community in Cork, 1916-1923* (Oxford, 1998), p. 208.

²³⁷ Outrage report (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1886 763/20619).

character' existed for Moonlighters among the people. He contended that 'they have it in their mind that moonlighting helps them to withstand the landlord'.²³⁸

Furthermore, it appeared that Fenians orchestrated agrarian outrage to some extent. This was particularly evident during the Land League period when a network of Fenians existed within the league at both a local and national level. Although, as Owen Magee has demonstrated, leading I.R.B. figures such as John O'Leary attempted to prevent its members from participating in agrarian outrages since the winter of 1880-81, there is some evidence of Fenian complicity in a number of outrages in Kerry by 1885.²³⁹ A rifle seized off one of the Moonlighters who attacked Doyle at Brida, Casey, was believed to have been part of shipment of guns sent to Kerry from London by Fenians a number of years previously.²⁴⁰ During the land war period the I.R.B. had purchased 4,018 firearms which had been imported into Ireland. Importantly, loyalty of many members of the movement was dependent on their continuing to receive arms in return for their subscriptions.²⁴¹

Other anecdotal evidence suggests that Moonlighters considered themselves Fenian in outlook by 1885 and 1886. When a jury at the Kerry Spring Assizes acquitted Patrick Moynihan of outrage offences in March 1886 despite compelling evidence against him, he shouted out the Fenian catch cry 'God Save Ireland' as he left the dock.²⁴² On another occasion a group of Moonlighters informed a farmer who they were demanding a gun off that they believed that 'they were doing [their country's cause] immense good'.²⁴³ During this period this Fenianism was vague and undefined with little coherent objectives or leadership beyond the local. Considine was of the opinion that the practice of robbing arms was partly based on a 'vague idea that at some future time there will be occasion to use these arms for there national aspirations'.²⁴⁴ However, Fenianism remained a popular ideology despite the apparent success of the National League and Parnellism. In November 1885, a monument to the Manchester Martyrs was unveiled in Tralee town. A large-scale demonstration, of 8000, marched to Rath graveyard in a

²³⁸ *Cowper Commission: evidence...*, p. 46.

²³⁹ Magee, *The I.R.B.*, p. 79.

²⁴⁰ Outrage report (N.A.I., CSO RP, 1886 763).

²⁴¹ Magee, *The I.R.B.*, p. 86.

²⁴² *K.S.*, 16 Mar. 1886.

²⁴³ *K.S.*, 12 Mar. 1886.

procession 'as the bands played the dead march in Saul'. Michael Davitt gave a speech that was loaded with republican rhetoric. He stated that 'we are assembled to honour three men of the people who proudly died and offered up their lives as sacrifices on the altar of Irish liberty'. He further evoked republican sentiment when he stated that it was the peoples' 'holy duty to emulate them and prove if necessary that death alone will be welcome to you in the cause of Irish liberty'.²⁴⁵ Despite that the 1885 General Election was to be held the following week no reference of it or to the National League movement was made during the speech. The leading Fenian members of the Tralee League were present. However, the clergy and leading leaguer in the county, Edward Harrington, did not attend. The crowd of 8,000 was a large number for any political demonstration and was almost equal to the reported 10,000 who heard William O'Brien and Timothy Harrington speak at a league demonstration in Listowel the previous month. The meeting demonstrated that even at the height of Parnellism, Fenianism remained a popular political ideology.

6.10: Conclusion

Although Fenianism originated in the 1850s, it was its fusion with agrarianism in the late 1870s and early 1880s that embedded the political viewpoint in many rural regions. The emergence of agrarian-Fenianism appeared to have been orchestrated by figures beyond the local. These were largely Fenians working through the Land League on both a regional and national level. Significantly, league money from the central branch funded Fenian secret society activity in the Castleisland region, although this was most probably of a limited nature. Furthermore, there was also evidence that influences from America orchestrated some outrage in Kerry. However, by 1885 the organisation of Fenians appeared to have been completely undermined by Parnellism. The leadership of the National League was thoroughly reformed and the neo-Fenians of the Land League period were either politically isolated such as Davitt, or had emigrated to America (Boyton, Brennan et al). The hierarchical and authoritarian leadership of the National League attempted to enforce a move away from radical agrarianism from the top down.

²⁴⁴ *Cowper Commission: evidence...*, p. 46

²⁴⁵ Demonstration in Tralee in connection with the unveiling of a monument in memory of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien, 29 Nov. 1885 (N.A.I., CSO RP 1885 23035).

The largely conservative clerical and middle class local leadership of the movement supported these efforts. The isolation of radicals appeared complete during the convention to select candidates for the general election in November 1885 when all four nominations for the county went to 'moderates'. Despite this and the assertions of much of the local and national leadership, agrarian violence continued throughout 1885 and 1886. Moonlighting drew on certain customs common to the role of young men in peasant society, earning them a degree of legitimacy within their local communities. The powerful social forces surrounding moonlighting were painfully depicted in the Furies region after the murder of Curtin. The local and national leadership of the league failed to curtail the harassment of the bereaved Curtin family after the shooting dead of one moonlighter and subsequent prosecution of two others by members of the family. The level of animosity created towards the Curtin family was so extreme and influential, the 'people' sacrificed mass and ignored the bishops warning leading to the closure of the parish Catholic Church. Evidently, the Parnellism of the middle classes and the influence of religion were not strong enough to overcome the localised nature of the dispute. Other factors also undermined the league's ability to control moonlighting. The contrast between young landless Moonlighters and the middle aged landholding local league leadership ensured that they were ultimately disconnected from each other leaving the latter group little or no power over the former. However, much of the agrarian violence appeared to uphold the principles and objectives of local branches of the National League demonstrating that much of the motives of leaguers and secret societies coalesced in a complex juxtaposition. This can be explained by the presence of figures close to or on the fringes of league branches, such as Lawrence Quinlan in Castleisland, who orchestrated violence at an individual level to enforce the 'law of the league'. While this did appear to be the situation, the evidence of the informer, Buckley, indicated that larger farmers patronised Moonlighters to some extent hinting at a wider conspiracy. Significantly, while the authorities easily identified outrages as emerging from Fenians or leaguers, undoubtedly much was born out of personal disputes with little or no political objective or connection to landlord-tenant relations. Ultimately the failure of the forces of Parnellism to either put down moonlighting or reform it into the National League's constitutional course, ensured that a radicalism remained within the Kerry countryside.

By 1886 this radicalism had a definite agrarian-Fenian character, which appeared to exist largely at a grassroots level.

Conclusion

Between 1872 and 1886 popular political activity in county Kerry was transformed. This process originated in the 1872 by-election when a Protestant home rule candidate, named R.P. Blennerhassett, defeated the traditional landlord candidate, who was aligned with the Catholic clerical hierarchy in the county. This election highlighted the identification of large sections of the tenant farmer electorate with the nascent home rule movement. Tenant farmers, aligned with urban middle class tradesmen, demonstrated a political power, which was independent of both landlord and Catholic hierarchical clerical control. Much of this political appetite was born out of the social and economic developments experienced by tenant farmers in the post-Famine period. As a result of a consolidation of agricultural holdings and an increase in agricultural prices, the agrarian economy underwent a period of prosperity. In turn, the living standards of larger tenants improved in line with this increased wealth while literacy levels grew as more of an emphasis was put on education. These trends, coupled with the heightened sense of Nationalism created as a result of the 1867 Fenian rising, provided the social, economic and political context for the emergence of the home rule movement in the early 1870s. However, after 1872 the home rule movement faded and failed to dominate electoral politics in the county. During the 1874 general election a home rule candidate was defeated by The O'Donoghue in the contest for the Tralee Borough while the seat of the liberal M.P., H.E. Herbert, was not contested in the county constituency. Furthermore, after this election the politics of home rule lost momentum and no local clubs or associations emerged in the county dedicated to the movement. In place of home rule politics; political activists, Fenians and large tenant farmers turned to a renewed tenant-right movement in the form of the K.T.D.A. Although loosely connected with the wider Central Tenants League, it was essentially a localised tenant organisation. Despite that very prominent home rulers had leading positions in the association (J.J. Long editor of the *Tralee Chronicle* and leading home ruler was its president) the body remained agrarian and didn't espouse home rule politics. It wholly concentrated on tenant grievances, and in particular highlighted increases in rent, which were common on Kerry estates during the 1870s. The K.T.D.A. appeared to overcome potential political divisions

when it held a mass demonstration in Tralee in 1877, which was attended by home rulers, Fenians, leading Catholic clerics and The O'Donoghue. Despite this development, the emergence of The O'Donoghue (backed by large tenant farmers) in the K.T.D.A., provoked the urban home rulers to resign from the organisation, on account of his failure to support the home rule party. By 1879 the organisation dissipated and was divided along political lines and in turn failed to develop into a mass movement.

A central factor for the failure of the K.T.D.A. to achieve widespread support during much of the 1870s was the on-going prosperity in the agrarian economy. The prevalence of record high prices for agricultural products undermined the necessity for a large-scale agrarian movement or agitation. The vibrancy in the agricultural economy was reflected in the high prices or 'fines' tenants and investors received and paid for farm holdings. Tenants frequently sold the lease of their farms and the interest in their holdings to bidders for large sums with little or no interference from landlords. Furthermore, the agrarian economy had increasingly developed on a credit system. Banks, shopkeepers, merchants and 'gombeen men' all gave various forms of loans and credit. The majority of this lending was invariably reliant on the continued buoyancy in the agricultural economy and the maintenance of high prices. After 1876 the economy was precipitously undermined by a combination of a drop in prices and a number of consecutive bad harvests. Under these conditions the agrarian economy became paralysed. By September 1879 the seriousness of the situation was reflected in the fact that £14,180 had been litigated against tenant farmers for ordinary and landlord debts to date for the year. In contrast, in 1869 the figure was a mere £746.

Initially, the depression most seriously affected the poorer small farmers and labourers, who were suffering from extreme destitution. To relieve this distress, a number of initiatives were established by both the government and private charities. The government allocated significant sums of money on a loan basis to landlords and sanitary bodies to create relief works, which was allocated through the Board of Works. Although the money was dispensed slowly and some landlords and tenants didn't take up the offer, by October 1880 over 6,000 individuals were relieved on such works. Furthermore, the government utilised the poor law system to a limited extent, by relaxing the rules governing out-door relief, and offering tenants the opportunity to get new seed potatoes.

Undoubtedly, the government response to the distress was effective. However, a more significant development, in relation to the emergence of tenant politics, was the establishment of private relief committees, which received money from the Mansion House Relief Committee. Forty-six local relief committees, largely controlled by the Catholic middle classes with the clergy to the fore, emerged. Based predominately on a parish basis, it highlighted the existence of an extensive non-gentry tenant leadership structure at a local level.

While the efforts to relieve the distress of the small farmers and labourers proved largely successful, the political response remained moderate during 1879. In contrast to the radical Land League agitation that developed concurrently in the 'west', which had the 'abolition' of landlordism as its focus, the reaction in Kerry remained closely related to traditional tenant-right demands. However, the non-payment of rent led to landlords issuing ejectment and eviction notices, resulting in heightened landlord-tenant tensions. The K.T.D.A. remained divided and powerless offering little effective leadership to an increasingly anxious tenantry. In this political vacuum, The O'Donoghue held a tenant demonstration in January 1880, which attracted up to 4,000 tenants. Soon after the March 1880 general election, led to the emergence of Parnellite politics in the county. In the Tralee borough, The O'Donoghue ran against the contentious land agent Samuel Hussey. Despite past tensions between The O'Donoghue and home rulers in the town, support galvanised around him, and leading Parnellites such as Timothy Harrington and his newspaper, the *Kerry Sentinel*, took a prominent part in the election campaign. The election provided Parnellite politics with a popular platform in the town.

Correspondingly, a grassroots agitation that attempted to resist rent payment and prevent eviction, which incorporated violent and intimidating methods, had emerged in the northern half of the county. A number of agrarian agitators, who had little history in tenant-right politics but were widely believed to have been closely related to the I.R.B., appeared to have directed much of this activity. By May these figures appeared to have been brought into the traditional tenant leadership fold during a meeting addressed by Parnell at Beaufort. The meeting, at which Parnell gave an extremist speech, was attended by Catholic clergy, tenant farmers, urban traders, Parnellites and radical agrarian agitators. Throughout the remainder of the summer of 1880, the number of agrarian

outrages grew while representatives of these various groups spearheaded a number of 'indignant meetings' called to protest against landlord action.

Notwithstanding that no Land League branch was established in the county by September 1880, the doctrine of the movement; concerning paying rent at the government valuation and the prevention of evictions, was becoming a cornerstone for localised agitation. Importantly, intimidation and violence was used to enforce these objectives indicating a significant 'radical influence' in the developing movement. The destruction of a number of evicted tenants' dwellings by the increasingly bellicose land agent, Samuel Hussey, in order to prevent reoccupation, led to the establishment of the Land League in Tralee in October 1880. With Timothy Harrington, editor of the *Kerry Sentinel*, as the central organiser of the league in the county, the number of local branches established in Kerry rapidly grew to fourteen. Although the official policy of the league attempted to concentrate on landlord-tenant issues, meetings of local branches quickly descended into tribunals into intra-tenant affairs and familial disputes concerning access to land. These tensions threatened to divide the movement locally and illustrated that many of the agrarian disputes of the period had little to do with landlord-tenant relation. Timothy.

Although an agrarian imbroglio simmered below the surface of the agitation at a local level, as the agitation wore on the state and government increasingly became the focus of Land League hostility. This intensified when the government arrested the leadership of the Tralee Land League in January 1881 for holding illegal courts relating to land. After the arrests a governmental inquiry into case was initiated in Tralee, which mirrored the ongoing 'state trials' in Dublin of the Land League leaders. The inquiry was a farce and no concrete evidence against the Tralee Leaguers emerged, resulting in their release. The case provided the league with a propaganda and moral victory over the police and government. After the release of the suspects, Timothy Harrington and the league leader Michael Boyton toured the county promoting the movement's new 'rent at the point of the bayonet' strategy in February 1881. This policy had a clear large farmer bias and signified a new direction for the movement. Furthermore, during the spring of 1881 the Catholic clergy emerged as an important grouping within the league and appeared to dampen the 'radical' element in the movement leading to a decrease in

agrarian outrages. While larger farmers and Catholic clerics assumed greater influence in the movement, landlords, organised by the P.D.A., developed new techniques to counter the agitation. Instead of undergoing costly and lengthy eviction processes, landlords simply issued a civil bill for an ordinary debt against tenants' stock and more importantly, the interest in their holdings. This effectively undermined the league strategy, which attempted to bankrupt landlords with drawn out evictions and high legal costs. In turn, during the summer of 1880 league policy became increasingly militant and demanded that tenants undergo eviction, even when they could afford to pay their rent. As a result many tenants, unwilling to lose their full legal rights on their holdings, turned away from the league. Furthermore, the central branch of the league failed to provide promised money to striking tenants creating much dissension at a local level.

The Land League was never a hegemonic grouping and by the middle of 1880 it was apparent that a range of different opinions and interest groups existed within the movement. These sectional interests were brought to the fore with the introduction of the Land Bill in April 1881. The more conservative larger farmers and clerics largely welcomed the bill, while many Parnellites and radicals deprecated it. The passing of the Land Act in the autumn of 1881 led to the attenuation of the movement in Kerry. Divisions over the bill were played out in the local Nationalist press with the *Kerry Independent* supporting the act, and the *Kerry Sentinel* following the official Parnellite line of 'moderate' opposition. The Land League's disintegration was compounded with the arrest of Parnell and the subsequent suppression of the movement.

In October 1882 the Irish National League was established. Founded and controlled by Parnell, the league placed home rule to the forefront of politics and regulated the land question to secondary importance. In doing so, Parnell attempted to concentrate on constitutional methods and remove radical agrarianism from popular politics. However, the ability of this nascent movement to replace the land question with home rule as the focus for popular politics at a local and regional level remained untested in 1882. While it has been suggested that the land question became 'a metaphor for the larger issue of nationality', this process was still very much in its infancy in 1882.¹ Much

¹ Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (2nd edn., London, 1999), p. 127; Philip Bull, *Land, politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 95.

of the historiography on the period tends to concentrate on Parnell, politics at a 'high level', and the National League's role in the 1885 general election with little appreciation of how the movement developed at a local level. Significantly, the emergence of the National League in Kerry, lacking the momentum of the economic distress that propelled the Land League in 1880, was a failure in 1882-83. Tenant farmers appeared far more concerned with the activities of the Land Commission, which were actively reducing rents, than becoming embroiled in another political movement. Created by the 1881 Land Act, the commission reduced rents by an average of twenty-three per cent. Although it proved popular with tenants of all sizes, a higher percentage of larger farmers benefited. The 1881 Land Act and 1882 Arrears Act greatly defused the necessity of tenants for agrarian or political mobilisation. Other factors, including the coercive effects of the 1882 Crimes Act and class tensions between farmers and agricultural labourers, undermined the emergence of the movement. Despite the failure of the National League to materialise during 1882-83, certain aspects of tenant politics developed during the Land League era continued. Although no branch infrastructure existed, ex-Land Leaguers continued to successfully achieve power on boards of guardians, while the league objective of boycotting evicted land remained intact in certain regions. Notwithstanding these continuances, by 1884 the number of agrarian outrages and evictions had decreased to their lowest level since the emergence of the agitation, which indicated that landlord-tenant relations had stabilised to some extent.

During this period a number of local initiatives that transcended the Nationalist and Unionist politics of home rule developed. A campaign emerged to lower local taxation in 1884, which witnessed the alignment of Catholic Nationalists and Protestant traders in Tralee town. Such Protestants were denied access to local government bodies and positions such as the Grand Jury and Justices of Peace, which were dominated by the gentry. Although Protestants were increasingly isolated from the Catholic nature of the Irish National League, they had previously supported the Land League in Tralee town. Similar co-operation between Catholic and Protestant traders in Tralee and gentry figures was apparent in attempts to establish a butter factory in 1884. Furthermore, leading Nationalists, and in particular Edward Harrington, became centrally involved in organising sporting events with gentry figures. Horseracing and an annual athletic sports

day were jointly organised by such figures. Despite the politicisation of society that had occurred during the previous number of years, Nationalist traders, who were central to the emergence of the land agitation, displayed a willingness to engage with Protestant traders and leading gentry figures over civic issues, such as improvement in agricultural techniques, and the organisation of local sporting events.

The failure of the Nationalism of the National League in Kerry was highlighted in September 1884 when the Lord Lieutenant, supported by the Catholic clerical hierarchy and gentry in the county, orchestrated a successful public visit to the region. The situation changed rapidly by April 1885 when the Prince of Wales visited the country and the county. The league had begun to emerge in Kerry and by this stage fourteen branches were in existence; although they were largely concerned with local concerns demonstrating little interest in 'national' issues. This was altered with the visit of the prince. Under the direction of the central branch of the National League, leaguers in the county organised extensive counter-demonstrations to the visit. Similar demonstrations were held across the country. Significantly, these demonstrations provided the movement with an immediate 'national' focus, which had hitherto been lacking. Furthermore, the visit gave an injection of Nationalist/Unionist politics, which was largely non-existence in the county since the agrarianism of the Land League. Furthermore, it provided a popular platform for the ideology of Parnellism, which emanated from the central executive.

Throughout the spring and early summer of 1885 the National League continued to grow in the county. However, in Tralee town the movement quickly became divided with the emergence of the G.A.A.. The president of the Tralee League, Edward Harrington, declined to join the new sporting movement and instead carried on his active patronage of the Tralee Athletic Sports, which had by this stage become aligned with the I.A.A.A. When both organisations held events on the same day, the G.A.A., organised by Fenian members of the National League, proved far more successful. While the political factors surrounding the emergence of the G.A.A. have often been stressed, its success in Tralee demonstrated that its development must be placed in the wider context of the sporting and associational revolution underway in mid-to-late Victorian society.

Edward Harrington's continued patronage of what were seen as gentry' related sports and his failure to support the G.A.A., led to serious repercussions for his role in the National League. Led by the I.R.B. and G.A.A. members of the branch, he was subsequently removed as president and replaced by a publicly known Fenian, William Moore Stack. With the general election encroaching, the central branch of the National League wanted to ensure that candidates that were fully loyal to Parnellism would be elected and potential devise radicals be sidelined. In turn, the central executive under the control of Edward Harrington's brother, Timothy, enforced the hierarchical powers in his hands and suspended the Tralee branch. The extensively reported split appeared to have had wider ramifications, as tensions developed between the leadership of the National League and the G.A.A. over the issue. Concurrently, a number of dissenting nationalists, such as Michael Davitt, publicly criticised the hierarchical nature of Parnell's National League. However, the Tralee Leaguers failed to galvanise large-scale support from other branches in the county who had little motivation to antagonise the central leadership. As the likelihood of Parnell successfully achieving home rule increased, Michael Davitt, and Fenian leaders such as John O'Leary, gave their full backing to the constitutional movement removing the possibility of a rupture within the Nationalist ranks. In turn, the position of the Tralee Leaguers was undermined and they had become increasingly isolated at a county and national level. Eventually the Tralee activists capitulated and Edward Harrington was re-elected as president of the branch. The success of the central branch over the localised Fenian motivations of the Tralee League was a triumph for the transition in politics from the local concerns of the Land League, which frequently reflected the immediate circumstances of specific regions, to the supplementation of such issues by a wider 'national' politics. It also reflected the dominance of the constitutionalist nature of Parnellism over Nationalist politics and the inefficacy of potential radicals and Fenians within the broader movement during the latter half of 1885.

Regardless of the tensions within the Tralee League, the movement grew rapidly during 1885. Throughout much of this period the central branch of the league attempted to concentrate the movement on constitutional issues concerning the impending general election and the politics of home rule. The situation was altered with the passing of the Ashbourne Act in August 1885, which introduced new land purchase legislation. The

introduction of the act had the effect of providing an immediate injection of agrarianism into the Nationalist movement. With the tenant goal of peasant proprietorship apparently on the horizon, the payment of rent suddenly became inextricably linked with the issue of purchase. The situation forced Parnell and the leadership of the National League to place agrarianism at the centre of the movement during September. This was highlighted in Kerry when T.M. Healy promoted agrarian agitation at a mass demonstration in Killarney during September. Foreshadowing the Plan of Campaign, Healy called on tenants to form anti-rent combinations and pool their unpaid rents into a defence fund to fight their landlords. As a corollary to the local realities of on-going economic distress and the significance of the new purchase act, the league leadership dispelled their previous recalcitrance to agrarian agitation. This agrarianism was fundamental to the growth of the National League in the county.

During the final three months of 1885 large numbers of tenants, organised by local branches of the National League, sought rent reductions. Landlord debt, combined with a reluctance to grant further concessions after the 1881 Land Act and 1882 Arrears Act, led to many landholders refusing their tenants demands. In turn, anti-rent combinations emerged and tenants lodged their rents with trustees as a form of defence fund. Landlords' readopted tactics developed during the land war and seized tenants' stock and the interest in their holdings. Large numbers of writs for evictions were also served and the Property Defence Association reemerged. Landlord-tenant relations rapidly deteriorated leading to the re-emergence of the tensions and strife that marked the Land League period.

By the end of 1885 the National League had developed into the largest mass movement witnessed in the region during the nineteenth century. Based on the parish unit of administration, over sixty branches were established. Throughout the year a total of 358 branch meetings were reported in the movement's mouthpiece, the *Kerry Sentinel*. This mobilisation was witnessed countrywide and by December, Timothy Harrington confidently boasted that over 1,500 branches of the league were established; each with an average of 300 members. The leading members of the National League at a branch level shared a number of socially defining characteristics. Many were middle aged, married and had sizable farms, or were leading townsmen such as shopkeepers and publicans.

With access to land and marriage, this class formed the provincial elite outside of the non-gentry population. With a long and established involvement in politics from the 1870s and the Land League, the National League was tailor made for this grouping. The social objectives of the National League, which amounted to the lowering of rent and setting the terms of purchase, greatly appealed to this class. The radical tenor of the Land League was largely sidelined. Despite such a large presence of moderate clerics and tenant farmers, a radical core of violent agrarian activists remained persistent within the movement's leadership.

The large number of local branch meetings illustrated the realities of the National League movement at a local level. To some extent branches were concerned with wider 'national' issues, local government and parliamentary elections. However, over fifty-eight per cent of resolutions passed were specifically related to agrarian affairs and the enforcement the league's laws and resolutions to such issues. Factors relating to the lowering of rent, protection of evicted land from 'grabbers' and the promotion of the rights of agricultural labourers dominated branch activity. To enforce the 'law of the league' branch meetings quickly developed into 'league courts'. Significantly, the majority of the cases that came before the league attempted to enforce National League rules on rent payment and 'land grabbing'. While the development of these courts may have appeared revolutionary, they essentially reinforced the social conservatism of the middle to large tenant leadership of the movement. The potentially divisive and radical demand for redistribution of large and grazier farms by small farmers and labourers did not materialise in local branches in Kerry. The 'law of the league' and National League courts were centrally aimed at protecting and promoting the interests of middle to large tenant farmers. Although agrarian motivations led to the rapid emergence of the National League in 1885, this agrarianism was cloaked in the political ideology of Parnellism. The local elite of Catholic clergy and urban and rural middle class, which formed the leadership of the movement, perpetuated the rhetoric of Parnellism. Although the National League can in no way be credited with the construction of the concept an Irish 'nation', the Catholic and conservative character of the movement and its widespread existence at a local level was a watershed in the development of Nationalism. At a local level the National League provided the tactic link between the socio-economic forces of

the Catholic Church, the non-landlord elite of rural society and tenant farmer agrarianism, within the broad political framework of home rule. These groupings were intermittently inter-linked at a local level long before the National League but the movement provided the most formal, organised and extensive expression of these groups under a single 'national' political objective.

Historiography on agrarian outrage in the pre and post Famine period has concentrated on two propositions. These revolve around the merits of rural violence being an expression of Nationalist and/or class consciousness.² The circumstances surrounding the agrarian violence of the 1880s are subject to a similar analysis. A central question that remains unexplored in the historiography on the period is the relationship between agrarian violence and the Land and National League movements. During 1880 agrarian outrage had developed in Kerry in the months before the establishment of the Land League in October. Fenians were suspected of orchestrating much of this violence. When the Land League did emerge, there was a significant Fenian element in its makeup. Importantly, the police widely believed that a Fenian conspiracy existed, which orchestrated the extensive agrarian violence of the period. Similarly, it was contended that these Fenians operated within the confines of the Land League, acting as a vigilante police for the movement. Furthermore, evidence suggests that a limited number of Fenian figures within the national leadership of the league, provided funds for the commission of outrages in the county, and particularly in the highly volatile Castleisland region. Despite this, there was constant opposition to outrages within the county and there is little evidence to indicate that the wider Land League leadership condoned such acts. It was evident, that figures within or on the edges of local branches got together to plan physical intimidation, which although in support of league motives, was not necessarily consented to by other members.

The suppression of the Land League and announcement of the 'No Rent' manifesto in late 1881 led to a large increase in violent outrage. Police believed that this was politically orchestrated by radical leaguers and Fenians, in an attempt to undermine

² See Michael Beames, *Peasants and power: the Whiteboy movements and their control in pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex, 1983); Tom Garvin, 'Defenders, Ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-Famine Ireland' in *Past and Present*, no. 96 (1982), pp 133-55; K.T. Hoppen, *Elections and society*,

the government's decision to suppress the Land League. In Kerry, the number of serious outrages increased and during 1882 four murders had been committed, along with a large number of shootings and other violent and intimidating acts. This was particularly evident in the Castleisland region, where a number of 'Moonlight' gangs were in operation. These 'Moonlighters' were associated with local Land League figures. Furthermore, the police were of the opinion that Fenians acting at both a local and regional level, with influence from the United States was orchestrating this violence. However, the police often over played the politicisation of these acts, which were often shrouded in personal and private vendettas.

The emergence of the National League led to strenuous attempts by its leadership to maintain the movement as a constitutional body. This became of particular importance during the run up to the 1885 general election when the parliamentary party and the National League had to appear as moderate and 'reasonable' as possible before a sceptical British public. The leadership of the league utilised its hierarchical authority to prevent the excesses of boycotting. The radical and Fenian influences that permeated the Land League leadership were purged from the new movement by Parnell and his loyal inner circle. Similarly, Fenian and radical figures were sidelined at a local level. In Kerry this was evident during the suppression of the Tralee League. In November 1885 it became even more pronounced at the county convention to select candidates for the four newly created parliamentary constituencies. All the candidates selected had clerical support and had no history in violent agrarianism, while those that were widely suspected of involvement in radicalism failed to receive any of the nominations.

Notwithstanding the attempt of much of the national and local leadership of the National League to prevent violence, inevitably agrarian outrage grew in tandem with the movement. Many of these outrages corresponded with the objectives of the National League and appeared to have been committed to uphold the power of the league. However, the complicated nature of many land disputes ensured that the motives for much violence lay in personal motivations.

1832-85 (Oxford, 1984), pp 341-78; A.C. Murray, 'Agrarian violence and Nationalist in nineteenth century Ireland: the myth of Ribbonism' in *Irish Social and Economic History*, xiii (1986), pp 56-73.

The complex relationship between agrarian violence, the National League and the wider tenant community was illuminated with the killing of a large tenant named John O'Connell Curtin in November 1885. A 'gentleman farmer' and leading member of the National League, Curtin's house was raided by a gang of Moonlighters. During the raid, Curtin shot and killed one of the Moonlighters. In turn, Curtin himself was shot by the attackers and mortally wounded. Curtin's daughters identified two members of the gang and later provided the authorities with the necessary information to prosecute them. As result of killing one of the Moonlighters and the subsequent evidence submitted to the police, the Curtin family were subjected to intense intimidation and boycotting. The local and national leadership of the National League condemned the hostility towards the Curtin family. Furthermore, the bishop of the diocese closed the church as a result of the intimidation. However, such pressure from religious and nationalist leaders failed as the antagonism towards the family continued, indicating the power of the Moonlighters in the region.

After the December general election and the increased likelihood of home rule, the need of the leadership of the movement, to curtail agrarian violence was even greater. However, during January the on-going landlord-tenant agitation for rents intensified, leading to a number of high profile evictions and the outbreak of new strikes. In turn, agrarian outrages continued unabated, and to a large extent appeared to correlate to the objectives of the local branches of the National League. This was particularly evident in Castleisland where the practice of attacking cattle grazing on evicted land had widespread support from the local tenant community. Individuals long associated with radical agrarianism remained in the leading positions in many branches indicating that they remained a powerful and influential presence at a local level. By the start of 1886 it was apparent that the Parnellites had little control or power over these groups. The frequent condemnation of outrage by sections of the local leadership had little effect. Within some branches, power struggles between moderate and radical influences were played out.

The failure of the moderate leadership of the league in the county to restrain the violent agrarians was based on a number of factors. Socially, those who participated in Moonlighting were drawn from a class of small artisans, labourers and farmers' sons whose life chances were limited by the 1880s. They were largely young, landless and had

limited marriage opportunity. They contrasted greatly with the middle aged, land holding and 'respectable' leadership of the league that attempted to curtail their activities. The fact that moonlighters invariably raided larger tenant farmers further indicates tensions between the two groups.

Importantly, the leaders of radical agrarianism appeared to have been somehow connected with Fenianism. Throughout the Land League period, Fenian involvement in the orchestration of agrarian violence was apparent in the county. While Fenians were ostracised by Parnell from the national leadership of the National League, many remained at a local level. By 1885 these figures were central to the commission of much outrage in the county. Significantly, the Fenianism of moonlighters was largely of an undefined and vague nature with little if any leadership beyond the local. Although Fenianism originated in the 1850s, it was its fusion with agrarianism in the late 1870s and early 1880s that embedded the political outlook in many rural regions. Ultimately the failure of the forces of Parnellism to either put down moonlighting or reform it into the National League's constitutional course, ensured that a radicalism remained within the Kerry countryside. By 1886 this radicalism had a definite agrarian-Fenian character, which appeared to exist largely at a grassroots level.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Number and valuation of agricultural holdings in county Kerry

PLU	£4 and under	£4- £10	£10- £15	£15- £20	£20- 30	£30- £40	£40- £50	£50- £100	Over £100	Total
Caherciveen	1141	1263	286	99	48	21	6	7	3	2874
Dingle	1346	869	336	174	110	29	17	14	5	2900
Kenmare	574	1011	302	118	70	24	6	11	1	2117
Killarney	1557	1157	614	364	456	182	106	150	32	4618
Listowel	1693	661	449	342	379	169	78	104	30	3905
Traleec	2402	1231	659	451	350	266	146	207	35	5747
Glin (part of)	183	137	66	35	28	16	8	8	6	487
Total	8896	6329	2712	1583	1441	707	367	501	112	22648

Source: *Return of agricultural holdings, compiled by the local government board in Ireland from the returns furnished by the clerks of the poor law unions in Ireland 1881*, pp 4-7 [C 2934], H.C. 1881, xcii, 793.

Appendix 2

Geographical breakdown of outrages committed in county Kerry, 1 Jan. 1881- 31 Dec 1884.

	Castleis	Dingle	Kenmare	Killarn	Killorg	Listo	Traleec	Val/Cah	Total
Murder	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	6
Manslaughter	1	0	1	2	2		1	0	7
Firing at the person	11	0	2	10	1	6	4	1	35
Firing into dwellings	6	0	0	4	1	4	5	0	20
Injury to property	7	6	3	5	6	19	13	5	64

Robbery of arms	10	0	0	10	0	11	22	1	54
Demand of arms	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5
Administration of unlawful oaths	7	0	0	2	0	2	10	2	23
Threatening letters	63	2	5	28	18	0	41	0	157
Intimidation	24	0	1	21	1	6	22	6	82
Incendiary fire	10	2	2	9	2	31	14	1	71
Robbery of process	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Resisting process server	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Threatening notices	82	10	20	47		93	90	17	359
Cutting the person	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	2	7
Maiming cattle	3	0	0	3	0	0	5	1	12
House attack	3	1	0	8	0	4	2	3	21
Aggravated assault	1	0	1	2	2	0	3	1	10
Assault endangering life	0	0	0	3	0	2	1	2	8
Cattle stealing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cutting cattle	3	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	7

Killing cattle	2	0	0	0	1	4	3	1	11
Forcible possession	0	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	6
Levying contributions	0	1	0	10	0	0	3	1	15
Affray	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Assault on bailiffs	0	0	0	2	0	3	4	0	9
Burglary	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Assault	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
Riot	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Demand of money	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Highway	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total	233	24	39	178	34	190	349	47	869

Source: Geographical breakdown of outrages committed in county Kerry, 1 Jan. 1881- 31 Dec 1884 (N.A.I, CSO RP 1884 20904).

Appendix 3

Electoral divisions in the poor law unions of Kerry divided into valuation per acre.

Total Electoral Divisions: 154								
	0-4s	5-8s	9-12s	13-16s	17-20s	£1	£2	Total

Caherciveen	20 (90.1%)	2 (9.1%)	0	0	0	0	0	22
Dingle	16 (80%)	4 (20%)	0	0	0	0	0	20
Glin (part of)	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Kenmare	15 (93.7%)	1 (6.3%)	0	0	0	0	0	16
Killarney	11 (35.5%)	7 (22.6%)	12 (38.7%)	0	0	1 (3.1%)	0	31
Listowel	1 (3.1%)	24 (75%)	6 (18.8%)	0	1 (3.1%)	0	0	32
Tralee	14 (45.2%)	6 (19.4%)	6 (19.4%)	3 (9.7%)	1 (3.2%)	0	1 (3.1%)	31
Total	77	47	24	3	1	1	1	174
Percentage	50%	30.50%	15.50%	1.90%	0.64%	0.64%	0.64%	100%

Source: Return showing, with regard to each electoral division in Ireland, the gross rateable valuation per acre, the total population, the rateable valuation per head of the population, and the average poor rate for the last five years, H.C. 1887 (27) lxxi, 51.

Appendix 4

Breakdown of number, size and number of families and people on holdings in Listowel, 1881.

Killarney	Number of holdings	Area in statute acres	Number of families	Total population
Not exceeding one acre	153	149	148	777
Over 1 to 5 acres	332	1,156	357	1,907
Over 5 to 10	474	3,952	521	3,080
Over 10 to 15	296	3,814	336	1,987
Over 15 to 20	357	6,636	422	2,496
Over 20 to 30	631	16,791	788	4,771
Over 30 to 50	788	34,749	1,047	6,711
Over 50 to 100	745	53,154	1,145	1,142
Over 100 to 200	245	33,269	452	449
Over 200 to 500	102	29,205	259	1,684
Over 500	42	44,951	148	765
Total	4,175	227,823	5,625	34,955

Breakdown of number, size and number of families and people on holdings in Listowel, 1881.

Listowel	Number of holdings	Area in statute acres	Number of families	Total population
Not exceeding one acre	167	143	172	865
Over 1 to 5 acres	496	1,644	473	2,739
Over 5 to 10	293	2,348	318	1,890
Over 10 to 15	154	2,012	182	1,069
Over 15 to 20	187	3,421	227	1,403
Over 20 to 30	289	7,620	347	2,216
Over 30 to 50	547	22,287	748	4,863
Over 50 to 100	605	43,172	981	6,628
Over 100 to 200	219	30,754	505	3,268
Over 200 to 500	77	21,383	332	2,204
Over 500	9	6,732	116	709
Total	3,043	141,516	4,401	27,854

Breakdown of number, size and number of families and people on holdings in Tralee, 1881.

Tralee	Number of holdings	Area in statute acres	Number of families	Total population
Not exceeding one acre	171	101	206	1,024
Over 1 to 5 acres	369	1,173	354	2,260
Over 5 to 10	297	2,254	339	1,784
Over 10 to 15	234	3,023	283	1,561
Over 15 to 20	276	5,628	317	1,886
Over 20 to 30	445	11,469	561	3,702
Over 30 to 50	743	30,605	1,067	7,132
Over 50 to 100	828	36,977	1,346	8,952
Over 100 to 200	301	41,087	620	4,156
Over 200 to 500	104	26,018	322	2,155
Over 500	81	19,367	148	865
Total	3,805	197,183	5,363	33,468

Source: *Census of Ireland 1881: area, population and number of houses; occupations, religion and education volume ii: province of Munster* [C 3148], H.C. 1882, lxxvii, 1.

Appendix 6

Occupations of persons arrested under the Protection of Persons and Property Act, 1881, county Kerry.

Occupations	Percentage of suspects arrested in Kerry	Percentage of suspects arrested countrywide
Professional sector	0	4.6
Teachers	0	
Clergy	0	
Commercial and industrial sector	29.3	32.6
Traders and business proprietors	10.4	
Artisan	10.4	
Clerks and commercial assistants	1.7	
Road contractor	1.7	
Urban labourers	5.2	
Agricultural sector	65.5	62.0
Farmers	17.3	38.7
Farmers' sons	25.9	15.5
Evicted farmer	1.7	
Labourers	17.3	4.2
Farm Servant	3.5	0.5
Unknown/unemployed	5.2	
Total suspects	58	845

Sources: 'List of persons arrested under the Protection of Persons and Property Act, 1881' (N.A.I., CSO ICR); Samuel Clark, *Social origins of the Irish land war* (Princeton, 1979).

Appendix 7

Name, address, occupation and suspected crime committed of those arrested in county Kerry under the Protection of People and Property Act, 1881.

Name	Residence	Occupation	Suspected crime and evidence
Castleisland District			
Terence Brosnan	Castleisland	Publican	N/A
Timothy Brosnan	Castleisland	Publican's son	N/A

John Burke	Cordal East	Farmer	Set fire to a house. All the bad characters in the Cordal region suspected of meeting in his house.
John Coffey	N/A	Farmer servant	Attacked house and fired shots.
Edward Hussey	Ballgree	Farmer's son	N/A
Bart Hussey	Ballygree	Farmer's son	Same offence as Coffey above.
Daniel Kelliher	Cordal	Farmer	Posted no rent notice on chapel door. Suspected of being a member of a secret society.
P.D. Kenny	Ballymacaddam	Farmer	Organising illegal raids.
Denis Griffin	Ballyplymouth	Farmer	Forcibly reinstatement on farm he was evicted from.
Jeremiah Leahy	Cordal	Farmer	Posting threatening letters warning farmers not to pay rent
David Mahony	Cloonacullig	Farmer's son	Same offence as Coffey above.
George Marshall	Mount Nicholas	Farmer's son	Searching for arms
John Reidy	Farran	Farm servant	Same offence as John Coffey
L Quinlan Arrested twice	Farran	Farmer's son	Attacking police station. Also same offence as John Coffey.
Thomas Walsh	Castleisland	Shoemaker	Searching for guns
Patrick Quinlan	Farran	Farmer's son	N/A
Henry Williams	Dyer		Same offence as Coffey
Caherciveen District James Griffin	Glenveigh	Farmer	Ringleader of unlawful assembly of 500 people.

Killarney District			
Conor Brosnan	Ballymalis	Labourer	Searching for arms
Daniel Collins	Bounard	Labourer	Shooting and wounding person.
John Courane	Drumdoohig	Farmer	Damage to property he formerly held
Cornelius Cronin	Lissycower	Farmer's son	Attacked tenants who paid their rents
Philip Cronin	New Quarter, Killarney	Labourer	Same as above
Cornelius Doyle	Kilcoolaght	Farmer	Attacked dwelling house of three labourers who worked for local landlord and cut ear off one of the inhabitants.
Patrick Doyle	Ardglass	Farmer	Raiding houses, President of Tough LL
Cornelius Leary	Leauyglissane	Farmer's son	Recognised ring leader of attack that Cronins, Kelliher and Long arrested for.
Jeremiah McMahon,	Bushmount	Farmer's son	Intimidating tenants not to pay rent
Andrew Moynihan,	Bounard	Labourer	Shooting and wounding person. Same as Danile Collins above.
Cornelius Kelliher	Islanderagh	Farmer's son	Same attack as Cornelius and Philip Cronin
John Kelliher	Islanderagh	Farmer's son.	Same offence as above
Denis Long	New Quarter	Labourer	Same offence as above
Patrick Murphy	Rath	No occupation	N/A
William Walsh	Killarney	Labourer	Same attack as the Cronins, Kelliher and Long.

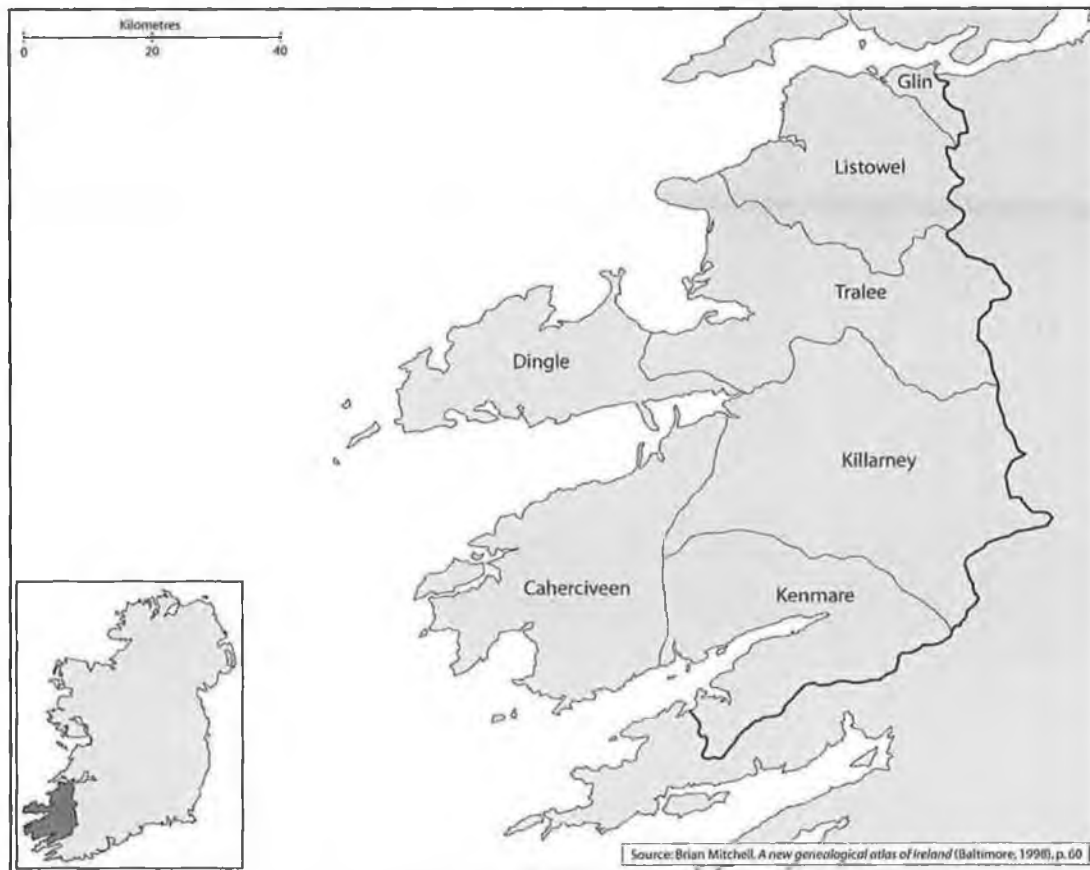
<u>Listowel District</u>			
James Barton	Ardoughter	Labourer and fisherman	Intimidating farmers from not paying their rents.
Mathew Breen	Ballybunnion	Publican	Involved in boycotting
Michael Carroll	Brosna	Shopkeeper and farmer	Leading Land League member.
Timothy Dooling	Knockadereen	Shoemaker	N/A
William Enright	Ballybunnion	Labourer	Set fire to house
William Fenix	Crumkeen (Causeway)	N/A	Making seditious speeches and writing threatening letters
Francis Gentleman	Ballybunnion	N/A	Land League figure.
William Lavery	Ballybunnion	Baker and shopkeeper	League figure in region, sells <i>Untied Irishman</i> .
Thomas O'Connell	Knocknogoshel	Road contractor	Secretary of Knocknagoshel Land League. Making speeches inciting boycotting.
Martin Sullivan	Knockadee	Farmer's son	Wrote threatening letters.
Tralee District			
Thomas Dee	Causeway	Shoemaker	Wrote threatening letters and a suspected fenian.
Patrick Driscoll	Ashill	Labourer	Shot a caretaker on a farm he was formerly evicted from.
John Healy	Upper Castle St, Tralee	Harness maker	Administering unlawful oaths.
John Houlihan	No residence	No occupation	Prominent member of the Ballyduff Land League
John Kelly	Tralee	Draper and auctioneer	Seditious speeches. Holding League courts. Leading member of Tralee branch.
Michael J Nolan	Tralee	Tinsmith	N/A
Sylvester Poff	Cioshclay	Labourer	Same offence as

			Driscoll, Poff evicted tenant.
Michael Power	Tralee	Pig Dealer	Promoting fenianism. Leading member of Tralee Land League.
William Moore Stack	Tralee	Office clerk	Organising treasonable practices.
Corneluis Sullivan	Ballygillagh	Labourer	Same offence as Driscoll and Poff.
Dingle District Daniel Kevane	Maumagallane	Farmer	Maiming animals.

Source: 'List of persons arrested under the Protection of Persons and Property Act, 1881' (N.A.I., CSO ICR).

Appendix 8

Map of poor law unions in county Kerry



Appendix 9

Map of towns in county Kerry



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